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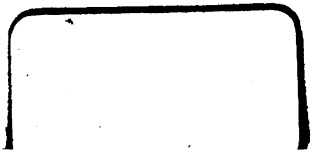

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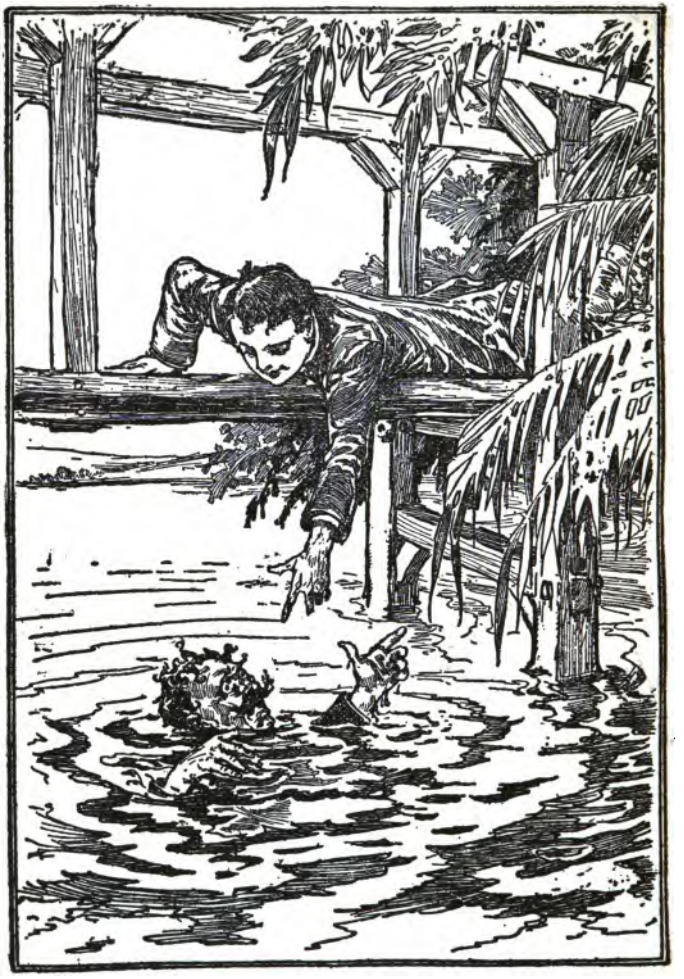

"Help! I Drown!" Came in a Muffled Voice.

Frontispiece.

The Motor Boat Club at Nantucket

OR

The Mystery of the Dunstan Heir

By

H. IRVING HANCOCK

Author of The Motor Boat Club of the Kennebec,
The Motor Boat Club Off Long Island
Etc.

Illustrated

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ПРАВУВА
ВІВТІС
МЕДАЛЬЯ

The Motor Boat Club at Nantucket

CHAPTER I

THE PAIR IN THE SEAT AHEAD

"IS the 'Meteor' a fast boat?"

"Very fast, indeed."

"But can she beat anything along this coast? That's what I want to know."

"Judge for yourself. On her trial trip she made within a small fraction of twenty-eight miles an hour."

"Whew! That's tremendous speed, even for a fast and costly boat such as the rich build to-day. But how long has she been in the water?"

"Since last March."

"She may have fouled a good deal since then, or her machinery may be a good deal below the mark by this time."

"Humph! For that matter, something could be made to happen to the boat, I suppose."

Of the two men carrying on this conversation in a day-coach seat on a railway train, one was

five-foot-seven, florid and somewhat stout, with a bull neck and keen, twinkling eyes. His whole appearance hinted that he had spent most of his forty years of life on the open sea. The other man, who was short, slim and swarthy, with narrow, piercing black eyes, might have been a few years older. His every motion betokened great activity. One might have guessed him to be a Spaniard. His general attire, though it was somewhat careless, would place him in the business-man class.

At the first mention of the name "Meteor" two American boys, seated immediately behind the men, started slightly and immediately were all attention. Each boy was about sixteen years of age. Tom Halstead was fair, brown-haired and blue-eyed, with a naturally merry look. Joe Dawson was darker, somewhat more reserved in manner and was Tom's fast chum and great admirer.

Yes; readers of the preceding volume in this series will recognize Tom and Joe at once as the young Americans who became the original members of the Motor Boat Club of the Kennebec. It was they who put Broker Prescott's fast motor boat, the "Sunbeam," once more in commission; they who went through some most lively adventures along the coast near the mouth of the Kennebec and who rendered tremendously

important services to Revenue Officer Evans, a cousin of the broker, in penetrating the secret of Smugglers' Island.

Now these same two members of the Motor Boat Club were traveling on business that they believed to be wholly commonplace. They were headed for the island of Nantucket, south of Cape Cod. The experiences ahead of them, they imagined, were to be of the most ordinary kind. They had no glimpse, as yet, of the new excitements that Fate had in store for them. They had no hint of the startling adventures into which they were soon to be plunged.

But that mention of the name "Meteor" had aroused their instant attention. That was the name of the motor boat that they were to join and take charge of at Wood's Hole. The craft was the property of Mr. Horace Dunstan, one of the wealthy residents of the island of Nantucket.

An ordinary boy might not have heard the low-toned conversation of the pair in the seat ahead. But Tom and Joe, attuned to the life of the sea and with ears trained to note the slightest irregularity of the sound of machinery, possessed acute hearing indeed.

At the first words of that conversation between the unknown pair Tom gave Joe a slight nudge in the side. Dawson's eyes promptly

closed, his lips parting, his head sinking slightly forward. He appeared to be sound asleep. Halstead seemed to be wholly interested in the newspaper at which he was glancing. Not even when the possibility of foul play to the "Meteor" was mentioned did either youngster betray any further sign. Indeed, the men in the seat ahead were evidently confident that the boys could not hear their low-pitched talk. None of the other seats near by was occupied.

The accommodation train from Boston, rolling slowly along late in this July afternoon, had just left Falmouth for its run of a few miles to Wood's Hole, the last stop, as this would be the end of the mainland route. Across the meadows the hot breath of July came through the open car windows. The brightness of the sunshine inclined one to close his eyes, so that Joe Dawson's slumber seemed the most natural thing in the world. Indeed, Tom Halstead's eyes were narrowing; he seemed the next candidate for a doze. Yet, depend upon it, neither boy had been more awake in his life. The slightest hint of possible mischief to the boat that was soon to be intrusted to their care was enough to set their nerves a-tingle.

"That was a queer rumpus on Boston Common the other day," began the florid-faced man. The subject had been changed. No further

mention was made of the "Meteor." Tom Halstead felt tremendously disappointed. He had hoped to hear more that would be of interest to himself. But the pair in the seat ahead did not again refer to the "Meteor." So Tom, after stealthily making a few pin pricks in his newspaper, settled far down in his seat, holding the paper before his face as though reading. In reality he was studying what he could see of the faces of the men who had so suddenly aroused his interest. With the paper close enough to his face the pin holes were almost as good as windows.

Over those last few miles droned the train. Tom felt cheated in not hearing more, but to all appearances the strangers had forgotten the existence of the "Meteor." When the train was yet a mile out from Wood's Hole the two men arose, going to the forward end of the car. The train slackened in speed, the two men dropping off on the further side of the car from where the boys sat. By the time that Halstead deemed it prudent to slip across to a window opposite, the two men were out of sight.

"Now what on earth can be the reason for those two fellows desiring any injury to a gentleman's private yacht?" muttered Tom, rejoining his chum.

"At all events, it's handy to be well warned in advance," returned Joe with a quiet grin.

"Yes, if we run across that pair within twenty cable lengths of the boat we'll know 'em and be on our watch," answered Halstead with a meaning flash in his eyes.

They had little more time for puzzling their heads, for the train was now rolling in at the little station at Wood's Hole. There were less than a dozen people to disembark. Out of such a small crowd anyone looking for two young motor boat experts would have little difficulty in selecting the two boys with weather-tinted faces, who wore suits of strong, serviceable navy blue, soft brown canvas shoes and straw hats. So a tall, slender man of forty-five, dressed in outing gray and wearing an expensive fine-straw hat, came at once toward them.

"Captain Tom Halstead?" he inquired, looking from one boy to the other.

"That's my name, sir," Tom answered. "You are Mr. Horace Dunstan?"

"Yes. And heartily glad that you did not disappoint me."

"There was no good reason why we should, sir," Halstead rejoined, then presented his chum. Mr. Dunstan shook hands with both very cordially, although he was not able to conceal entirely his astonishment at their youthfulness.

"I—er—really expected to find you a little older," Mr. Dunstan admitted with an easy laugh. "However, it's all right. My friend, Prescott, told me he had found, among the sea-coast boys of Maine, some of the best material for motor boat handlers in the world. I asked him to send me the best pair he knew, so, of course, it's all right, for Prescott never goes back on a friend."

"We've handled Mr. Prescott's boat in some rather tight places," said Tom quietly.

"You have your suit cases, I see. There's no need to carry them down to the water front. Come over here and hand them to the driver."

Mr. Dunstan led the way to the solitary hack at the station, though neither sturdy boy would have thought anything of walking and carrying his baggage.

"Now we'll drive down at once and you'll see the 'Meteor,'" proposed their host. "Perhaps you will be able to tell, very soon, what ails the craft. I have had one or two local machinists look her over and the owner of one small motor boat who thought he knew all about such craft. Yet the engine doesn't work well enough for me to be satisfied to try to use the boat."

In a few minutes the three alighted near a pier that jutted some hundred feet out over the

water. At the further end lay as jaunty a fifty-foot craft as either boy had ever laid eyes on.

"So that's the 'Meteor'? Oh, she's a dandy!" cried Tom in a burst of enthusiasm.

"Say, look at the beauty of her lines! What speed she ought to be good for, with a strong, well-behaving engine!" came from quiet Joe.

Horace Dunstan smiled with pardonable pride as he led the way down the pier. As far as first impressions went the boat was worthy of extended praise. Though only five feet longer than the "Sunbeam," she had the look of being a much larger craft. There was more forecastle. The space of the bridge deck seemed better arranged. There was an awning over the bridge deck and another over the cockpit aft. The cabin looked roomier. From davits at the starboard side swung a natty-looking small boat.

"Gr-r-r-r!" came a warning sound from the closed forecastle as the trio stepped aboard.

"In the absence of crew I've kept my bull pup down in the engine room," explained Mr. Dunstan.

"A mighty good idea," muttered Tom with a swift recollection of the fragments of conversation he and Joe had overheard on the train.

"Stand back a moment, until I let him out and present you to him," requested the owner.

"Don't be afraid of him. Bouncer is a very intelligent dog. He'll understand an introduction as quickly as a human being would."

One of the forecastle windows was open, to give air to the dog, though it was not large enough to let him out.

"It's all right, Bouncer," called Mr. Dunstan reassuringly, as he fitted a key at the forecastle door. "Now come out like a four-footed gentleman and meet some friends of ours."

Bouncer came nimbly out, a low-built, thick-set bulldog of the finest fighting type. He had a square-set pair of jaws that looked capable of taking a tremendous grip. His look, however, under the prompt petting of his owner, was kindly and curious.

"These young gentlemen are all right, Bouncer," spoke Mr. Dunstan. "Go over and get acquainted with them. Let them pet you."

Bouncer contented himself with a brief sniffing at each boy in turn. Then he submitted to caresses, wagging his short stump of a tail.

"He understands. You'll never need to be afraid of this dog, unless you do some such extreme thing as to attack me or a member of my family," Mr. Dunstan assured them. "Now come down into the engine room."

"Say, this *is* something like!" uttered Joe enthusiastically, as he stepped below and stood

looking about him. Here there was an abundance of room, for much of the engine was housed back under the bridge deck. The engineer had plenty of space in which to move about. Forward of the engine room, shut off by a curtain, was the galley. Here were stove, sink, ice box, dish-rack and room for a goodly supply of foods.

Through a passageway Mr. Dunstan led them under the bridge deck. Curtained off from the passage was a wide berth.

"We generally call this the captain's berth," explained the owner.

"I guess my berth will be on one of the engine room lockers with Joe," smiled Halstead.

The cabin proved to be spacious and handsome. The four locker seats could be fitted into berths when cruising. The cockpit aft was large and contained, besides side seats, half a dozen comfortable armchairs.

"Now suppose we go back to the engine," desired Mr. Dunstan, turning about. "I'm anxious, indeed, to know whether you can locate the trouble that has tied this craft up here."

Returning to the engine room, the boys opened their suit cases, taking out overalls and jumpers. Clad in these they were soon armed with wrenches and other tools, exploring the mysteries of that engine.

"This machine hasn't had very good care,"

spoke Joe after a while. "She's fouled with dirt and thick oil at a good many points."

"Has the motor been overheated?" asked the owner.

"I don't believe so, sir; at least, not to any serious extent," Joe stated as his opinion.

"Any repairs to parts going to be necessary?"

"A few, but simple ones, I guess. We ought to be able to make 'em from the materials at hand."

"You—er—couldn't run out to-night, I suppose?"

"We shall be very fortunate, sir," Joe answered, "if we can take this boat out to-morrow forenoon."

"We'll stay aboard to-night and work as late as we can," Tom explained. "Joe can't really tell, until we get started, just how much will have to be done. But the motor is not hurt past ordinary repair."

"I was going to ask you over to the hotel for dinner to-night," hinted the owner.

"There seems to be plenty of everything to eat in the galley," Tom answered seriously. "So, if you don't mind, sir, we'll stay right by our work and help ourselves to food as we can."

"Make yourselves at home, then. Do you

mean to sleep aboard to-night?" inquired Mr. Dunstan, as he started up the steps to the bridge deck.

"I think we'd better, for more reasons than one, perhaps," Halstead made answer, as he, too, stepped to the bridge deck. "Mr. Dunstan," he went on in a lower voice, "do you know of anyone who could have a good reason for wanting to injure your boat?"

"Why, no," replied the owner, though nevertheless he gave a slight start. "Why?"

Tom described the men and the conversation aboard the train. Mr. Dunstan listened with interest, though he shook his head when the two men were described.

"There might be a shadow of reason for their talk in one direction," he admitted, slowly and reluctantly. "But, pshaw, no; I'm dreaming. No, there can't be any reason for wanting to ruin my boat. Very likely you didn't hear quite right."

"At any rate," Halstead went on, "Joe and I will be aboard to-night, and probably every night as long as we're in your employ."

"You seem to take this thing seriously, Halstead."

"I don't believe, sir, in throwing away what seems like a very valuable hint. It won't do any harm for us to be watchful, anyway. By

the way, sir, do you mind letting the dog stay aboard, too?"

"Certainly you may have him," nodded the owner. "He won't interfere with you and he'll sleep with one eye and both ears open. Well, make yourselves at home here, boys. Do whatever you please in the galley and feed and water Bouncer. I'll be at the hotel this evening in case you should want me for anything."

After impressing upon Bouncer that he was still to remain aboard, Mr. Dunstan strolled leisurely down the pier. Both boys went hard at work.

"What do you make of our new employer?" asked Joe after a while.

"He seems like an ordinary, easy-going man," Tom replied. "I don't believe he ever startled anyone by doing anything very original, but he's a gentleman, and we're going to find him considerate and just. That's all we can ask in any man."

After that there wasn't much talk, except the few words now and then that related to taking the motor to pieces, and repairing and replacing its parts. At the close of day they helped themselves to a bountiful meal and made a fast friend of Bouncer by catering to his healthy appetite. Then, by the light of lanterns, they went to work again. It was after eleven o'clock

when they found themselves too drowsy to do further justice to their work.

"Let's go up on deck and get some air. After that we'll turn in," proposed Halstead.

"I wonder if we're going to have visitors or any trouble?" mused Joe. "Somehow I can't empty my head of that talk in the car this afternoon."

"If we *do* have any trouble," laughed Tom nodding down at the dog dozing on the deck at their feet, "I've a private notion that we're going to be able to pass some back—to someone."

Twenty minutes later the motor boat chums had made up berths on the engine-room lockers and had undressed and gone to bed. Both were soon sound asleep. They relied on Bouncer, who lay on the deck just outside the open hatchway, to let them know if anything threatening happened.

CHAPTER II

BOUNCER WAKES UP

WHILE our two young motor boat enthusiasts lie wrapped in the first sound slumber of the summer night, lulled into unconsciousness by the soft lapping of the salt water against the sides of the "Meteor,"

let us take a brief glimpse at the events which had brought them here.

Readers of the preceding volume in this series are aware of how the Motor Boat Club came to be organized. It now numbered fourteen members, any one of whom was fully qualified to handle a motor boat expertly under any ordinary circumstances.

Every member was a boy born and brought up along the seacoast. Such boys, both by inheritance and experience, are usually well qualified for salt-water work. They are aboard of boats almost from the first days of life that they can recollect. Seamanship and the work required about marine machinery are in the air that surrounds their daily lives. It is from among such boys that our merchant marine and our Navy find their best recruit material. It was among such boys that broker George Prescott had conceived the idea of finding material for making young experts to serve the owners of motor cruisers and racers along the New England coast.

Tom and Joe were undoubtedly the pick of the club for skill and experience. More than that, they were such fast friends that they could work together without the least danger of friction. Though Halstead was looked upon as the captain, he never attempted to lord it over

his chum; they worked together as equals in everything.

Mr. Dunstan had long known Mr. Prescott in Boston, where both had offices. So, when trouble happened in the "Meteor's" engine room, Mr. Dunstan had sent the broker a long telegram asking that gentleman to send by the next train the two most capable experts of the Club. He had added that he wanted the boys principally for running the boat on fast time between Nantucket and Wood's Hole, for the owner had a handsome residence on the island, but came over to the mainland nearly every day in order to run in by train to his offices in Boston. The "Meteor," therefore, was generally required to justify her name in the way of speed, for Mr. Dunstan's landing place at Nantucket was some thirty-five miles from Wood's Hole.

Further, Mr. Dunstan's telegram had intimated that he was likely to want the young men for the balance of the season, though his message had not committed him absolutely on that point. The pay he had offered was more than satisfactory.

Wood's Hole is a quaint, sleepy little seaport village. The main life, in summer, comes from the passing through of steamboat passengers for Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. The

night-air is so quiet and the sea scent so strong that even the city visitors at the little hotel find it difficult to stay up as late as eleven o'clock.

On this night, or rather morning, at one o'clock, there were but two honest people in the whole place awake. Over at the Marine Biological Laboratory, Curator Gray and an assistant were still up, bending drowsily over a microscope in one of the laboratory rooms. But that building was too far from the "Meteor's" pier for the scientists to have any hint of what might be happening near the motor boat.

It was the night before the new moon. The stars twinkled, but it was rather dark when the figures of two men appeared at the land end of the pier. On their feet these men wore rubber-soled canvas shoes. Not a sound did they make as they started to glide out on the pier.

But Bouncer woke up.

"Gr-r-r-r!" the bull pup observed, thrusting his head up, his hair bristling. All this required but a few seconds. In another instant Bouncer was at the rail, his nostrils swelling as he took a keen look down the length of the pier. Then an angrier growl left his throat. It ended in a bound and Bouncer landed on the pier. His short legs moving rapidly under him Bouncer rushed to meet the soft-shoed gentlemen.

That last, angrier note from the bull pup roused Tom Halstead as a bugle call might have done. He leaped to his feet, snatching at his trousers. Joe stirred, half alertly. When he heard his chum's feet strike the engine-room floor Dawson, too, sprang up.

"Mischief, just as we thought!" breathed Tom.

Down at the land end of the pier there was a sudden mingling of startled human voices.

"*Por la gracia de Dios!*" sounded an excited, appealing wail.

"Get away, you beast, or I'll kill you!" roared another voice in English.

Bang! That was the noise from the throat of a big-calibered pistol. It was followed, just as Tom bounded to the deck, pursued by Joe, by the rapid pounding of a horse's hoofs and the rattle of wheels.

"There they go!" cried Tom, leaping to the pier in his bare feet and racing shoreward over the boards. But it was too late for the boys to overtake the prowlers, who were now behind a fast horse.

"Did they shoot that fine dog?" growled Joe, his voice rumbling with indignation. Bouncer answered the question for himself by running to meet them, his tail a-wag, guttural grunts of satisfaction coming from his throat, while a

signal flag of information fluttered from his mouth.

"He took hold of one of 'em," chuckled Tom. "Good old fellow, you've brought us a sample of their cloth. Good boy! May I have it?"

Tom bent down to stroke the dog, who submitted very willingly. When Halstead took hold of the large, irregular fragment of cloth the bull pup grunted once or twice, then let go.

Back all three went to the boat. Tom lighted a lantern, then held the cloth forward.

"Brown, striped trouser goods," he chuckled. "Joe, whom have we seen with trousers of this pattern?"

"That Spanish-looking chap in the seat ahead on the train," muttered Dawson grimly.

"*Now* if Mr. Dunstan doubts that some one wants to put his boat out of commission we'll have something definite to call to his attention," uttered Tom excitedly. "Bouncer, you stocky little darling!"

Joe looked the dog over carefully to make sure that a bullet had not even grazed that reliable, business-like animal.

"If they had touched you, old splendid," growled Joe, "we'd have had a good clew or two for avenging you. But those rascals didn't even hurt your grit. You're ready for 'em again—if they come!"

For some time the boys were too excited to lie down again. When at last they did, they kept their trousers on, ready for any further surprise. Bouncer took up his old post on the deck above, seemingly free from any trace of excitement.

It was nearly half-past six in the morning when Joe next opened his eyes. In a hurry he roused his chum. Donning bathing trunks and shirts both dropped over the side for a refreshing swim. Then after drying and dressing, Halstead went forward into the galley, while Joe snatched a few minutes at the work left over from the night.

Breakfast was a hurried affair, for there was still much to do about the motor. It was after nine o'clock when Tom stood back, looking on inquiringly while Joe put on the finishing touches.

"Now I'll turn on the gasoline and see if we can get any news," proposed Joe. A few moments later he started the ignition apparatus and gave the drive wheel a few turns.

Chug! chug! the engine began slowly. Joe, oil can in hand, looked on with the attention of a scientist making an experiment. Bit by bit he increased the speed of the engine, smoothing the work with oil.

"Give us a little time and the old motor'll mote," observed Dawson quietly.

"Yes," nodded Tom equally observant.

Had they been more of amateurs at the work they would have felt elated, for the engine responded to all increased speeds that were tried. But these two had worked enough about motors to know that such an engine may come to a creaking stop when everything appears to be running at the best.

Chug! chug! It was a cheery sound as the minutes went by and the motor did better and better.

"I'm almost hopeful that everything is in shape," declared Dawson at last.

"Good morning, boys!" came a pleasant hail from the pier. "I see everything is in fine trim."

"It looks that way, Mr. Dunstan," answered Tom, stepping up above and, by way of salute, bringing his hand to the visor of the Club's uniform cap that he had donned this morning. "But motors are sometimes cranky. We don't dare begin to brag just yet."

"This morning's mail brought me a letter from Mr. Prescott," went on the owner, holding up an envelope. "He has written me seven pages about you. It seems that you are great pets of my friend's. He tells me that I can place every confidence in you."

"Why, that's mighty nice of Mr. Prescott," replied Tom quietly. He was greatly pleased, nevertheless, for he could now see that Mr. Dunstan's opinion of them had gone up several notches.

"Well, well," continued the owner, as he glanced smilingly down into the engine room; "are you going to cast off now and take me over to Nantucket? It's four days since I've seen my home and that lucky little rascal, Ted."

Tom didn't know or inquire who Ted was or why that "rascal" was so very fortunate. Instead he replied:

"We were thinking of a little trial trip first, sir, just to see how the craft will behave under way."

"Good enough," nodded the owner. "But I'm aboard, so why can't I go with you?"

"Of course you can, sir."

Tom ran ashore to cast off while Joe did some last fussing over the motor. Having cast the stern-line aboard and coiled it, Tom now came forward, throwing off the bowline, boarding with it.

"Start her up at very slow speed ahead, Joe," called down the young captain, taking his place at the wheel and throwing it over a little.

With the first throbs of the propeller the "Meteor" began to glide away from the pier.

Mr. Dunstan had taken his post at Halstead's right. The water being deep enough, the young captain moved out confidently.

"Just a little more speed, Joe," Tom called, when the pier end was some two hundred yards astern.

A little faster and still a little faster the propeller shaft turned, until it settled down to good work. The "Meteor" was moving at about twelve miles an hour.

"Fine!" cried Mr. Dunstan joyously. "We're all right now."

"We're not yet quite out of the—well, I won't say woods, but sea woods," smiled Tom quietly.

"I'm forgetting my duty," cried Mr. Dunstan in sudden self-reproach. "I must act a bit as pilot until you know these waters better."

"Why, I studied the chart, sir, nearly all the way from Portland," replied Tom. "I think I am picking up the marks of the course all right."

"You can't see Nantucket from here, but can you point straight to it?" inquired Mr. Dunstan.

"I'm heading straight along the usual course now," Tom replied.

"Right! You are. I guess you know your way from the chart, though you've never seen

these waters before. Keep on. I won't interfere unless I see you going wrong."

"Shall I head straight on for the island?" asked Halstead. "Or would you rather keep close to the mainland until we see how the engine behaves?"

"Keep right on, captain, unless your judgment forbids."

Tom, therefore, after a brief talk with his chum through the open hatchway, held to his course, to the south of which lay the big island of Martha's Vineyard, now well populated by summer pleasure seekers.

Notch by notch Joe let out the speed, though he was too careful to be in a hurry about that. He wanted to study his machine until he knew it as he did the alphabet. Every fresh spurt pleased the owner greatly.

"Your Club has some great fellows in it if you two are specimens," said Mr. Dunstan delightedly. "Prescott knew what he was writing when he told me to stand by anything you wanted to do."

By the time when they had the Vineyard fairly south of them and the craft was going at more than a twenty-mile gait, Tom judged that he should inform the owner of the happening of the night before. He therefore called Joe up from the motor to take the wheel. Then Halstead told

Mr. Dunstan what had taken place, exhibiting the fragment of cloth secured by Bouncer and connecting this, in theory, with the swarthy man they had seen aboard the train.

Bouncer, looking up in his master's face and whining, seemed anxious to confirm Tom Halstead's narration.

"Why, there's something about all this that will make it well for us all to keep our eyes open," said Mr. Dunstan.

Tom, watching the owner's face, felt that that gentleman had first looked somewhat alarmed, then much more annoyed.

"There's something that doesn't please him and I shouldn't think it would," the young captain reflected. "Yet, whatever it is he doesn't intend to tell me, just yet, at all events. I hope it's nothing in the way of big mischief that threatens."

"Of course I'd suggest, sir," Tom observed finally, "that Dawson and myself sleep aboard nights."

"You may as well," nodded the owner, and again Tom thought he saw a shadow of worriment in the other's eyes.

"Are you going to let Bouncer stay aboard, too, sir?" Tom asked.

"Ordinarily I think I'll let the dog sleep at the house nights," replied Mr. Dunstan, imme-

diately after looking as though he were trying to dismiss some matter from his mind.

Joe, too, had been keen enough to scent the fact that, though Mr. Dunstan tried to appear wholly at his ease, yet something was giving that gentleman a good deal of cause for thought. Mr. Dunstan even went aft, presently, seating himself in one of the armchairs and smoking two cigars in succession rather rapidly.

"We've put something into his mind that doesn't lie there easily," hinted Joe.

"But, of course, it's none of our business unless he chooses to tell us," replied Halstead.

A little later Joe Dawson went down into the engine room to get the best reasonable work out of the motor. Even at racing speed the "Meteor's" bow wave was not a big one. There was almost an absence of spray dashing over the helmsman. Tom did not need to put on oilskins, as he had often done on the "Sunbeam." The "Meteor's" bow lines were so beautiful and graceful, so well adapted to an ideal racing craft, that the bridge deck in ordinary weather was not a wet place.

As they neared cool, wind-swept Nantucket, Mr. Dunstan came forward once more, to point out the direction of his own place. This lay on the west side of the island. As they ran in closer the owner pointed out the mouth of a cove.

"We've come over in two hours," announced Mr. Dunstan, consulting his watch as they neared the cove.

"Now that we understand the boat and the engine," answered Tom, "we ought to go over the course in less than an hour and a half."

"Fine!" pronounced the owner. "That's what the boat was built for. Do that and I can make the trip to my Boston offices every week day—if I decide that it's best to do so."

Tom noted a certain hesitancy about those last few words. Again he felt sure that some mystery threatened the owner's peace of mind.

Into the cove and up alongside the pier the "Meteor" was run. From here large and handsome grounds and a huge white house, the latter well back from the water, were visible.

"We'll leave Bouncer on board for the present," said Mr. Dunstan. "I'll take you up to the house so you can get used to the place. By and by we'll have lunch. And I want to show you my boy, Ted."

CHAPTER III

THE LUCKIEST BOY IN THE WORLD

HARDLY had Mr. Dunstan's new boat crew followed him ashore when a whooping yell sounded from up the road that led to the house. Then into sight dashed a boy mounted on a pony. On they came at a full gallop, the boy reining up with a jerk when barely six feet from his father.

"Careful, Ted!" warned Mr. Dunstan laughingly. "Don't ride me down. You're not yet through with your use for a father, you know."

"I was trying to show you, dad, how Sheridan and I are learning our paces together," replied the youngster. He was a rather slightly built boy, with clustering yellow hair and gray eyes. He wore a khaki suit and a sombrero modeled after the Army campaign hat. Even his saddle was of the Army type, being a miniature McClellan in model.

Tom liked this lad after the first look. There was something whole-souled about this little fellow with the laughing eyes. And, though he had been reared in a home of wealth, there was nothing in the least snobbish in the way he sud-

denly turned to regard the Motor Boat Club boys.

"Ted, Captain Halstead and his friend, Dawson," said Mr. Dunstan. "You'll be glad to know that they've got the 'Meteor' in running order again."

Ted was careful to dismount before he offered his hand, with graceful friendliness, to each of the boys.

"You've made dad happy if you've got his boat to running again," laughed Master Ted.

"And you? Aren't you fond of motor boating?" queried Tom.

"Oh, yes; after a fashion, I suppose," replied the Dunstan hopeful deliberately. "But then, you see, I'm cut out for a soldier. I'm to go into the Army, you know, and anything to do with salt water smacks a bit too much of the Navy."

All of which remarkable declaration Master Ted made as though he imagined these new acquaintances understood all about his future plans.

"The Army is fond of the Navy, of course," the lad added by way of explanation. "Yet, to a soldier, the Army is the whole thing."

"Oh, I see," smiled Captain Tom, though in truth he didn't "see" in the least.

"Yes, Ted's to be a soldier. He's doomed—

or destined—to that career," nodded Mr. Dunstan good-humoredly. "There's a whole long story to that, Halstead. Perhaps you and Dawson shall hear the story later. But for now we'd better get up to the house."

Master Ted evidently took this as a hint that the subject was to be pursued no further for the present, for he merely said in a very gracious way:

"Of course, I shall see you again. So now I'll take myself off—with Sheridan."

Resting his left hand through the bridle and gripping the pony's mane, Master Ted used his right hand to strike the pony a smart blow over the rump. As the pony bounded forward the lad made a flying leap into the saddle. It was such a flying start as almost to startle Tom and Joe.

"He rides like a cowboy," declared Tom admiringly, watching the mounted youngster out of sight.

"He has need to, I fancy," replied Mr. Dunstan gravely. "That is, since he's going into the Army, for Ted wouldn't be satisfied with being anything less than a cavalryman."

As Mr. Dunstan's last words or the tone in which they were uttered seemed to dismiss the subject, Halstead and his chum knew that they were not to be further enlightened for the pres-

ent. They followed their employer up to the house.

He took them into a roomy, old-fashioned looking library, with heavy furniture, and, excusing himself, left them. He soon returned to say:

"The family are now at luncheon, all except Master Ted, so I have given instructions to have luncheon served to us in here presently."

In half an hour the meal was before Mr. Dunstan and the boys. It tasted rarely good after their hasty snatches of food aboard the boat. When it was over Mr. Dunstan took a chair on the porch, lighted a cigar and said:

"I'm going to take it easy for a while. Would you like to look about the grounds?"

Tom and his chum strolled about. They found it a delightful country place, covering some forty acres. There was a large stable, a carriage house and a garage which contained a big touring car. There were greenhouses, a poultry place and a small power house that supplied electric light to the buildings and grounds.

"It looks like the place of a man who has enough money, but who doesn't care about making a big splurge," commented Joe.

"It also looks like the place of an easy-going man," replied Halstead. "I wonder how a man

like Mr. Dunstan came to get the motor-boat craze?"

"Oh, I imagine he likes to live out on this beautiful old island, and merely keeps the boat as a means of reaching business," suggested Dawson.

After an hour or more they returned to the house to find Mr. Dunstan placidly asleep in the same porch chair. So the boys helped themselves to seats, kept quiet and waited. They were still in doubt as to whether their employer wanted to use the boat later in the day. Theirs was a long wait, but at last Mr. Dunstan awoke, glanced at his watch and looked at the boys.

"Becoming bored?" he smiled.

"Oh, no," Tom assured him, "but I've had hard work to keep from falling sound asleep."

"Have you seen Master Ted lately?"

"Not since we first met him down by the pier."

"That's a youngster with quite a picturesque future ahead of him, I imagine," continued Mr. Dunstan. "I call him the luckiest boy alive. Perhaps he is not quite that, but he is going to be a very rich man if he follows a certain career."

"It must be an Army career, then," hinted Halstead.

"It is, just that. And I suppose I might as

well tell you the story, if it would interest you any. A lot of people know the story now, so there's no harm in repeating it."

Their host paused to light a cigar before he resumed:

"Ours used to be a good deal of a military family. In fact, every generation supplied two or three good soldiers. There were five Dunstans, all officers, serving in the War of the Revolution. There were four in the War of 1812, two in the War with Mexico and two in the Civil War. We gradually fell off a bit, you see, in the numbers we supplied to the Army. The two who served in the Civil War were uncles of mine. My father didn't go—wasn't physically fit. There were three of us brothers, Gregory, Aaron and myself. Both were older than I. Aaron would have made a fine soldier, but he was always weakly. The fact that he couldn't wear the uniform almost broke his heart. Yet Aaron had one fine talent. He knew how to make money almost without trying. In fact, he died a very rich man.

"Greg, on the other hand, was what I expect you would call the black sheep of the family. He went to Honduras years ago. He's a planter, doing fairly well there, I suppose. He's pretty wild, just as he used to be. He's always getting mixed up in the many revolutions that they have

down in that little republic of Honduras. One of these days I'm afraid he'll be shot by a file of government soldiers for being mixed up in some new revolutionary plot.

"My brother Aaron never married. Greg has two daughters, but no sons. Ted is my only son and Aaron just worshiped the lad as the last of the race. Aaron wanted Ted to become a soldier and keep the family in the Army. The youngster was willing enough, but I didn't wholly fancy it. However, my brother Aaron died a little while ago and I found he had fixed the matter so that Ted will have to be a soldier."

"How could your brother do that?" asked Tom.

"Why, you see, under the will, brother Greg is let off with one hundred thousand dollars and I get the same. But there's a proviso in the will that if, within ninety days from Aaron's death, Ted appears in probate court with me or other guardian, and there both Ted and myself promise that he shall be reared for the United States Army, then half a million dollars is to be paid over to myself or other guardian, in trust for the boy. The income from that half million is to be used to rear and educate him. But Ted, as a part of his promise, must make every effort to get himself appointed a cadet at West Point."

"Some other boy might get the cadetship away from him," suggested Joe Dawson.

"In case Ted simply can't win a West Point cadetship," replied Mr. Dunstan, "then, at the age of twenty-one, his promise will oblige him to enlist in the Army as a private soldier and do all in his power to win an officer's commission from the ranks."

"Even then, there's a chance to fail," hinted Tom.

"If the lad fails absolutely to get a commission in the Army," responded Mr. Dunstan, "he will lose a lot of money—that's all. There is another fund, amounting to two and a half million dollars, that is to be kept at interest until the young man is thirty. By that time the money, through compound interest, will be much more than doubled. On Ted's thirtieth birthday all that huge sum of money is to be turned over to him if he has won, somehow, a commission as an officer of the Army. If he has tried, but failed, then the money is to be devoted to various public purposes.

"But if Ted fails to go into probate court on time, with myself or other guardian, and have the promise made a matter of record, then he loses everything. In that case I get the same hundred thousand dollars as otherwise, but Greg, instead of receiving only a

hundred thousand is to get a cool million dollars."

"Isn't your brother Gregory likely to contest such a will?" asked Tom thoughtfully.

"The will provides that, if he does contest, he shall lose even his hundred thousand dollars," Mr. Dunstan replied. "I have had great lawyers go all over the will, but they can't find a single flaw through which it can be broken. You see, the will is right in line with what lawyers call 'public policy.' It's altogether to the public interest to have the boys of our best old families, as of the best new ones, brought up with the idea that they're to give their lives to the service of their country. So the will is bound to stand against any contest, and if Greg or myself tried to break it we'd only cheat ourselves out of goodly sums of money."

"Then Master Ted, of course," pursued Tom, "has been or is going before the probate court to have the promise recorded."

"To-day is Tuesday," answered Mr. Dunstan. "The ninety days are up next Monday. On that day there will be a short session of probate court and Ted and I are going to be on hand."

"Is this the first time probate court has been in session since the will was read, sir?" asked Halstead.

"Oh, no," replied their employer in his most

easy-going tone. "But there was no hurry and I wanted to give the lawyers plenty of time to consider the matter. Next Monday, being within the required ninety days, will do as well as any other time."

"Well, of all the easy-going men!" gasped Tom inwardly. "To think, with such a big fortune at stake, of dilly-dallying until the very last day of all!"

"So, you see, Ted really *is* a very lucky boy," finished Mr. Dunstan.

"I should say he is!" breathed Halstead, his face flushing at the thought. *He* would have been happy over a West Point cadetship without any enormous reward.

"The luckiest boy I ever heard of!" vented Joe, his nerves a-thrill over this story of one of Fortune's greatest favorites. "No wonder your son, sir, is so eager about being a soldier."

"Is your brother Gregory in this country now?" asked Tom slowly.

"Not to the best of my knowledge," almost drawled their employer. "The last I heard of him he was still on his plantation in Honduras, probably hatching more revolutionary plots and giving the government a good excuse for sending its soldiers to shoot him one of these days. But I *do* know that, for a while, Greg had American lawyers hard at work trying to find some

way to smash Aaron's will. They gave it up, though, and so did Greg, after hearing from me that Master Ted was wild to follow a soldier's career."

Both boys were silent for some time. Yet, if they did no talking, their thoughts very nearly ran riot. To them it seemed that Ted Dunstan's lot in life lay in all the bright places of glory and fortune. How they would have relished such a grand chance!

"By the way," said Mr. Dunstan, rising slowly and stretching, "I haven't seen the youngster in hours. I think I'll locate him and bring him around here."

He went into the house. Within the next ten minutes two of the men servants left the house, running hurriedly out of sight in different directions. At the end of twenty minutes Mr. Dunstan himself appeared, looking actually worried.

"We can't seem to find Ted anywhere," he confessed uneasily. "The young man hasn't been seen since he stabled his pony at half-past twelve. I thought he would lunch with Mrs. Dunstan; she thought he was lunching with us. We've sent all about the grounds, we've telephoned the neighbors and the town, and all without avail. The pony is in the stable and the young man seems to have disappeared."

"Disappeared?" repeated Tom Halstead,

springing to his feet, electrified by the news. "Don't you think it more likely, sir, he's been *helped* to disappear?"

"You think he may have been spirited away?" demanded Mr. Dunstan. "But why?"

"Haven't you yourself told us, sir, that it would be worth some one's trouble, to the extent of nine hundred thousand dollars, to have the boy vanish?" asked Tom breathlessly.

"You suspect my brother?"

"Pardon me, sir, for forgetting that Gregory Dunstan is your brother," Tom went on whitening. "Yet that talk about disabling the 'Meteor'! The man who looked like a Spaniard—but the people of Honduras are of Spanish descent. Why should anyone want to disable the 'Meteor,' unless to stop a pursuit by water? You yourself have told us that your brother has a weakness for mixing up in revolutions down in Honduras."

All this Halstead had shot out jerkily, thinking even faster than he spoke.

"But at this very moment Greg is down in Honduras," objected Mr. Dunstan.

"Even if he is, wouldn't friends of his, who may want funds for a new revolution, see how easy it was to get the money through getting Ted out of the way?" asked Tom quickly. "Grant that your brother is wholly innocent of

any plot about your son. Wouldn't supposed friends of his perhaps be willing to spirit the boy away, knowing that, if the big money prize went to your brother, Gregory Dunstan could afterwards be persuaded to throw his fortune into some new revolutionary cause?"

"Yes, yes, it's all possible—horribly possible," admitted Mr. Dunstan, covering his face with his hands. "And Greg, who is a citizen of Honduras now, has even had aspirations in the way of becoming president of Honduras. Halstead, I will admit that I had even thought of the possibility of some just such attempt as this, and yet in broad daylight I dismissed it all as idle dreaming. And now Ted's gone—heaven only knows what has become of him!"

"Of course," put in Joe coolly, "it may turn out that the youngster just went fishing. He may walk in any moment for his supper."

"But he went without his lunch," retorted Mr. Dunstan. "That was wholly unlike Ted."

"The 'Meteor' may be disabled now," broke in Tom. "If she isn't, won't it be more than well worth while to get the craft out and go scouting through these waters?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Mr. Dunstan. "Come on, boys."

As they raced down through the grounds they espied the coachman returning.

"Come along, Michael!" shouted Mr. Dunstan. Then, to the boys he explained:

"If the 'Meteor' is fit to go out, Michael can go along with you. If there's any fighting he's a heavy-fisted, bull-necked fellow who'd face a regiment of thieves."

Joe had the key of the engine-room hatchway out in his hand before they reached the pier. In a jiffy he had the sliding door unlocked, almost leaping down into the engine room. With swift hands he set the engine in motion.

"All right here," he reported, while Bouncer, just liberated, frisked about his master's legs and then whined.

"Keep the bulldog aboard, too, Michael," called Mr. Dunstan, as he stepped ashore. "Start at once, Captain Halstead. Go as far and wide as you can and hail any craft you think may have news. Michael, I rely upon you to use your fists if there's need."

"If there's the chanst!" grinned the Irishman readily.

"I'll run back to the house and get in touch with the police," Mr. Dunstan shouted back over his shoulder.

Tom sprinted aft along the pier, throwing the stern-line aboard. He leaped aboard forward with the bowline, not stopping then to coil it.

Not even calling to Joe, whose head was

barely six feet away, young Captain Tom Halstead gave the bridge bellpull a single jerk. As the response sounded in the engine room alert Joe gave the engine slow speed ahead. Tom threw the wheel over and the fine boat glided out from her berth.

Two bells! Full spead ahead! The "Meteor" forged forward, gaining headway every moment. The hunt for missing Ted Dunstan was started in earnest.

CHAPTER IV

SIGHTING THE "PIRATE"

"HOW much speed do you want for this trip?" asked Joe, poking his head up through the hatchway as soon as the "Meteor" was running smoothly northward.

"On a hunt like this I think Mr. Dunstan will want us to burn gasoline," Tom answered. "Give her about all the speed she can make."

"That means twenty-five miles—or more?" insisted Dawson.

"Twenty-five will be close enough to going fast," Tom replied.

Almost immediately the fast motor boat began to leap through the water. Though the boat minded her helm sensitively, Halstead rested

both hands upon the wheel, watching intently ahead.

"Hey! What you trying to do? Swamp us with your wake?" demanded an irate fisherman in a dory, as they raced past him.

But they had gone only close enough to enable big Michael, standing on the deck house, to peer at the inside of the dory.

Several other small craft without cabins they ran close to in the same manner, making sure that no stolen boy was on any of them.

Up near Great Point they encountered a cabin sloop. Michael, however, recognized a clergyman friend as one of this party, so Halstead passed them with only a friendly toot from the auto whistle.

Then down around the east coast of Nantucket they sped, further out to sea now, since inshore no craft were observed. They kept on until the south coast, too, had been passed, but there was no sign to gladden their eyes nor arouse their suspicions. Next along the south shore of the island the "Meteor" raced, and on out to Muskeget Island. From this point they had only to round the latter island and steer straight back for the inlet where Mr. Dunstan's pier lay.

"Sure, I don't like to go back stumped like this," growled Michael.

"No more do I," rejoined Tom. "Say, we've

got daylight enough; I'm going to retrace our whole course and keep in closer to shore."

Joe, who for some time had been on deck, nodded his approval. Cutting a wide sweep, Tom headed back, going now within a quarter of a mile of the shore.

"It begins to look," hinted Joe, "as though whoever is leading the young Dunstan heir astray hasn't taken him off the island of Nantucket at all."

"There are plenty of hiding places on Nantucket, aren't there?" inquired Tom, turning to the big coachman.

"Plenty," nodded Michael, "if the rapscallions knew their way about the old island. But, by the same token, the rascals would be in plenty of danger of being found by the constables."

"Of course Mr. Dunstan is having the local officers search," pondered Tom aloud. "He said he would. He can telegraph the mainland from the island, too, can't he, Michael?"

"Sure," nodded the coachman.

"Then Mr. Dunstan must have waked up some pretty big searching parties by this time, both on the island and on the mainland," Halstead concluded. "But see here, Michael, why wouldn't it be a good plan to put you ashore? You can telephone Mr. Dunstan and see if there's any news."

"And if there ain't any," suggested the Irishman, "I might as well be going home across the island on foot, and keeping me eyes open. I can ask questions as I go along, and maybe be the first of all to find out any rale news."

"That'll be the best plan of any," approved Halstead. "It begins to look more sure, every minute, that we're not going to need your fine lot of muscle."

At the lower end of the east coast of the island Tom remembered having seen a pier that would serve them for landing the Irishman. They made for that pier accordingly and Michael leaped ashore.

"I'll telephone and then come back within sight," the coachman called back to them, as he started. "If 'tis good news I'm hearing, I'll throw up me hat two or three times. If 'tis no news, I'll wave a hand."

The "Meteor" then fell off, but kept to her bearings while ten minutes passed. Then Michael appeared in sight from the shore. He waved one hand and signed to the boys to keep on their course.

"Too bad!" sighed Tom. "But it makes it more certain than ever now, doesn't it, Joe, that some real disaster has happened to young Ted Dunstan? It's past the lad's dinner time now.

No healthy boy goes without either luncheon or dinner, unless there's a big reason for it."

"Unless Ted has merely gone to some friend's home and has forgotten to notify his parents," suggested Dawson.

"But Ted doesn't strike me as the boy who's likely to do that. He's a fine little fellow, and I don't believe he'd be guilty of being so inconsiderate as to leave home for hours without telling some one."

They had the "Meteor" under full headway now. Tom, with one hand on the wheel, kept a keen lookout. They had run along some miles when Halstead gave a sudden gasp, made a dive for the rack beside the wheel that held the binoculars and called sharply:

"Take the wheel, Joe!"

With that Tom Halstead bounded down into the engine room. Over at one of the open portholes he raised the marine glasses to his eyes.

"What's the matter?" called down Joe, filled with the liveliest curiosity.

"Matter enough!" came his chum's excited rejoinder. "Don't look when I tell you. Keep your eyes on your course ahead. But you saw that little pier over at port?"

"Yes."

"Maybe you noticed a man sitting there?"

"I did," Joe admitted.

"When I first saw him," Tom went on, showing his animated face at the hatchway, "I didn't think much about him. But the second time I looked I thought I saw something that brought back recollections. That was why I came down here for a near-sighted peep through the glasses. The fellow couldn't see me down here and so ought not to suspect that we have noticed him particularly."

"But who is he?" cried Joe eagerly.

"Oh, he's the right man, all right," Tom retorted perhaps vaguely. "He's got on either the same pair or another pair just like 'em."

"Pair? Of what?" demanded Joe.

"Trousers, of course, you dull old simpleton!" whipped out Halstead. "Joe, it's the same old pattern of brown, striped——"

"The Span——"

"The pirate, I call him," growled Halstead, stepping up on deck and replacing the binoculars in their rack without another look ashore. They were rapidly leaving astern the solitary one seated against the pier rail.

"Do you think——" began Joe, but Tom gave him no chance to finish.

"I don't think anything," broke in Halstead, alive with energy. "I am going to know—that's what."

Tom took the wheel himself, swinging the craft around a point of land just ahead.

"Look back, Joe. This shuts us out from the sight of that striped pirate, doesn't it?"

"Yes," nodded Dawson.

Tom shut off the speed, adding:

"Stand ready, Joe, to use speed or wheel, and keep her about so-so. I'm going to lower the dingey into the water and row ashore. I'll rig a line to her stern, so you can haul her back. Don't bother to get the small boat up at the davits. Just make her fast astern. And then——"

"Wait here for you," guessed Joe.

"No, as soon as you get the dingey made fast, put on headway and run the boat back to Mr. Dunstan's pier. Report to him, telling him just what I'm doing and assure him I won't be afraid to telephone if I learn anything worth while. I'll get over to his place as soon as I can, later in the evening."

Tom got the small boat into the water, left one end of a small rope in Joe's hands and rowed somewhat more than a hundred feet to the beach. From there he waved his hand. Joe began to haul in on the line. Within thirty feet of the beach the woods began; Halstead was quickly lost to his chum's sight.

Full darkness came on while Tom was still

in the woods heading cautiously south. As he hastened along, making little or no noise, Halstead wondered what he would do with the man in case he discovered him to be really one of the pair who had sat in the seat ahead on the train.

"I suppose I'd better wait and make up my mind after I'm sure it *is* the same fellow," Tom concluded.

The young skipper did not, at any time on this swift walk, move far from the shore line. At last he came to the edge of the woods, a very short distance from the pier he was seeking. There was still a man there, seated on the rail of the pier. There were some bushes, too, to aid in shielding the boy's forward progress if he used care. Tom went down, almost flat, then crept forward, moving swiftly, silently, between bushes.

At last he was near enough to be sure of his man, trousers and all. It was the same man Halstead had seen on the train. The "pirate" was at this moment engaged in rolling a cigarette.

CHAPTER V

A JOKE ON THE ENEMY

THE slight, swarthy stranger rolled his cigarette up nicely, moistening the edge of the paper, stuck the thing between his lips, lighted the tobacco and began to smoke in evident enjoyment.

"That's my party, all right," quivered Tom. "And now I've found him what on earth am I going to do with him?"

That was a new poser. Halstead had been so intent on identifying his suspect that, now he recognized him, he must figure out what was to be done.

"If the fellow is all right he ought to have no objections to going along with me and answering questions. If he won't do that"—here Tom's eyes began to flash—"I believe I'll make him. This is a business that calls for stern measures. This fellow belongs to the crowd that must know all about Ted Dunstan's disappearance."

Yet, to look at him, one would hardly suspect the swarthy man leaning against the pier rail of being a conspirator. As he smoked he appeared to be wholly at peace with himself and

with the world. He did not seem to have a care on earth.

As he still crouched behind a bush, watching the nearby fellow in the dark, an impulse of mischief came to Tom Halstead. He remembered that night prowling about the "Meteor" over at Wood's Hole, and he remembered how Bouncer had frightened this same man.

"Gr-r-r-r!" sounded Tom suddenly from behind the bush. "Gr-r-r-r! Woof! Woof!"

It was a splendid imitation of the growl and bark of a bulldog. At the same instant Tom made a semispring through the bush.

The "pirate" uttered a wordless howl of fright. He lurched, attempted to recover himself and leap at the same instant, and——

Splash! There was another howl of terror as the man slipped over backward, then, head-first, struck the water at the side of the pier.

"Help! I drown!" came in a muffled voice, and a new note of terror sounded on the night.

Now drowning anyone was as far from Tom Halstead's mind as could be. With an upward bound he sprinted out onto the pier, bending under the rail close to where the frightened one was making huge rings on the water in his struggle to keep up.

In his efforts the fellow reached one of the piles of the pier, hanging to it in mortal terror.

"Help, help, kind sir!" he pleaded hoarsely. "Not a stroke do I swim. Pull me out before I drown."

Throwing himself upon the pier, Tom bent down with both hands.

"Here, catch hold," he hailed. "You're in no danger. I'll pull you out all right."

It was some moments before Tom could persuade his "pirate" to let go that frantic clutch at the pile. But at length Halstead drew his dripping suspect up onto the boards of the pier.

"Where is that terrible, that miser-r-rable dog!" panted the swarthy one, glaring about him.

"That's all right," Tom answered composedly. "There isn't any dog."

"But—but I heard him," protested the other, still nervous, as he stared suspiciously around him. "The wr-r-retched animal sprang for me. His teeth almost grazed my leg."

Such was the power of imagination—a fine tribute to Tom's skill as a mimic.

"Aren't you thinking of the other night, over at Wood's Hole, when you tried to get aboard the 'Meteor' to wreck the engine?"

Halstead shot this question out with disconcerting suddenness. The young skipper looked straight, keenly, into the other's eyes, standing

so that he could prevent the stranger's sudden bolt from the pier.

"I? What do you talk about?" demanded the foreigner, pretending astonishment.

"Oh, I know all about you," nodded Tom. "You're the party."

"Be careful, boy! You insult me!" cried the other angrily.

"That's all right, then," Tom went on coolly. "Now maybe I'm going to insult you a little more. The trouble is, I need information, and you're the best one to give it to me. Where's Ted Dunstan?"

"I—I—you——" stammered the foreigner. "What do I know about Ted Dunstan? No, no, no! You are wrong. I have not seen the boy —do not know him."

"Yet you appear to know that he is a boy," insisted Tom sternly. "Come, now, if you won't talk with me you'd better walk along with me, and we'll find some one you'll be more willing to answer."

"How? I walk with you? Boy, do not be a fool," retorted the swarthy one angrily. "I shall not walk with you. I do not like your company."

"I'm not sure that I like yours, either," retorted the boy. "But there are times when I cannot afford to be particular. Come, why

should you object to walking along with me? All I propose is that we find the nearest constable and that you answer his questions. The constable will decide whether to hold you or not."

"Step aside," commanded the swarthy man imperiously. Full of outraged dignity he attempted to brush past the young skipper. But Tom Halstead, both firm and cool, now that his mind was made up, took a grip on the fellow's left arm.

"Take your hand off! Let me go!" screamed the fellow, his eyes ablaze with passion. "Out of my way, idiot, and take yourself off!"

As the swarthy one struggled to free himself Tom only tightened his grip, much as the bull pup would have done.

"Don't be disagreeable," urged Tom. "Come, my request is a very proper one. I'm only asking you to go before one of the officers of the law. No honest man can really object to that."

"You——" screamed the foreigner.

He shot his right hand suddenly into a jacket pocket. But Tom, watching every movement alertly, let go of the fellow's left arm, making a bound and seizing his right arm with both strong hands. There was a fierce struggle, but Halstead's muscles had been toughened by exer-

cise and by many days of hard work at a steering wheel in rough weather. This slight man from another country was no match for the American boy.

Down they went to the flooring of the pier with a crash, but young Halstead was uppermost. In another twinkling he was bending the swarthy one's right arm until that fellow was ready to sue for a truce.

Tom now held him helpless, kneeling on him.

"What were you trying to fish out of that jacket pocket?" demanded the young motor boat captain, thrusting his own hand in. He drew out something and held it up briefly—a clasp knife.

"A coward's tool!" uttered Tom, his voice ringing scornfully. Then he threw the clasp knife far out so that it splashed in the water. "Why don't you cultivate a man's muscle and fight like a man, instead of toting around things like that? Come, get up on your feet."

Bounding up, Halstead yanked the other upright. In a twinkling the swarthy man broke from him, sprinting off the pier.

"You haven't learned to run right, either," grinned Halstead, dashing after the "pirate" and gripping a hand in his collar.

That brought them facing each other again. How the swarthy one glared at his resolute

young captor! They were about of a height, these two, and might have weighed about the same. But the man possessed nowhere near the strength of this sea-toughened boy.

"Now see here," spoke Tom more pleasantly, "I'm doing what I think is right or I wouldn't venture to be so rough. Walk along with me sensibly, until we can find out where a constable lives. I've got the best of you and you realize I can do it again. But I don't want to be rough with you. It goes against the grain."

The swarthy one's only answer was to glare at the young skipper with a look full of hate.

Tom suddenly changed his tone.

"I know what you're thinking of, my man," he cried tauntingly. "You are just thinking to yourself what a fine time you'd have with me if you had me down in Honduras—where your friends do things in a different way!"

The taunt told, for the stranger's eyes gleamed with malice.

"Ah, in good Honduras!" he hissed. "Yes, if I had you there, and——"

He stopped as suddenly as he had begun.

"That's just what I wanted to know," mocked Halstead. "Honduras is your country, and now I know to a dot why you're interested in having Ted Dunstan vanish and stay vanished for a

while. Come along, now. We'll keep right on until we find that constable!"

Tom seized the stranger's right arm in earnest now. The other held back, as though he would resist, but suddenly changed his mind.

"You are somewhat the stronger — with hands," he said in an ugly tone. "So I shall go with you. But perhaps you will much regret what you are doing to-night."

"Oh, I hope not," Tom jeered cheerily. "At all events I'm doing the best I know how. And I'm glad you're not going to make any fuss. I hate to be cranky with anyone."

The place to which the pier belonged looked, from what Tom had been able to see of it, like a run-down coast farm. Away up on a hill to the left were a dilapidated old farm house and other buildings. Halstead feared, though, that the stranger might have friends up at that house and so decided to keep on through the woods at the right.

Before long they struck a fairly well defined road through the forest, a road that looked as though it might lead to somewhere in particular.

"We'll keep right on along this road, if you don't mind," said the boy. He kept now only a fair hold of the other's wrist. As the swarthy one offered no opposition, they made passably

good speed over the road. But Tom, though he looked unconcerned, was wholly on the alert for any sudden move on the part of his captive.

"If I find I'm wholly in the wrong," said Tom pleasantly, after they had gone at least a quarter of a mile in this fashion, "there isn't anyone in the whole United States who'd be more glad to make a complete apology."

"But that will not save you from trouble," breathed the swarthy one angrily. "The laws of your country do not allow such high-handed deeds as you have been guilty of."

"Down in Honduras the laws are a bit different, aren't they?" asked Halstead very pleasantly.

"Down in Honduras, they——"

The swarthy one checked himself suddenly.

"That is the second time you have asked me about Honduras," he went on presently. "Why do you say so much about Honduras?"

"I've trapped you into admitting that it's your country," laughed Halstead. "And that tells me, too, why you are so interested in having Ted Dunstan kept out of sight for the next few days."

"What's all this talk about Honduras?" demanded a gruff voice. The challenge made both jump. A stocky figure stepped alertly out from behind a tree. It was the solidly built,

florid-faced man—the other of the pair Tom had first seen in the seat ahead.

"Oh, you, you, you!" cried the swarthy one delightedly, as he wrenched his captive wrist free from Halstead's weakening clutch. "You have appeared in time, my friend!"

"So?" roared the florid-faced one, taking a business-like grip of Tom Halstead's collar. "What was this young cub doing?"

"Doing?" cried the swarthy one, dancing in his wrath, his eyes gleaming like coals. "He had the impudence, this boy, to say he would take me to a constable. He insists that I know all about one Ted Dunstan."

"Does, eh?" growled the powerful, florid-faced one, giving Tom a mighty shake. "Then we'll take care of this young man! Oh, we'll give him a pleasant time!"

"Yes, yes! Just as we would in Honduras!" laughed the swarthy one gleefully. "He has been asking much, just now, about the way they do things in Honduras."

"Then he'll be sure to be just the lad who'll appreciate a little information at first hand!" jeered Tom's captor.

CHAPTER VI

TOM HAS A BAD QUARTER OF AN HOUR

"SO the youngster was going to be high-handed with ye, was he?" demanded the florid-faced one, and despite the intense darkness there in the woods, Tom Halstead could see the ugly gleam in his strong-handed captor's eyes.

The swarthy one stepped to the other side of his friend and whispered something in that worthy's ear. It was a rather long communication. Though he tried with all his might to overhear some of it, Halstead could not distinguish a single word. Yet, as the narration proceeded, Tom felt that powerful grip on his coat collar increase in intensity.

"Well, we'll take care of you, youngster," declared the florid-faced one at last. "You're too big a nuisance to have at large! And as you've been giving your time to other folks' business, we'll take good care of your time after this! Come along now!"

Tom had not tried to resist and for a most excellent reason. He well knew that his present captor could fell him like a log. Here no con-

test of muscles was to be thought of. Craft must be substituted for strength.

In the boy's brain revolved swiftly many plans for escape. Just as the florid-faced one started to force him over the path lately taken the right idea came to the young captive. He puckered his lips, emitting a shrill whistle.

Nor had he guessed wrongly. There *was* an echo here. Back on the air came almost the exact duplicate of the whistle Halstead had let loose.

In a jiffy both of his captors halted. Perhaps they suspected it to be only an echo, but they wanted to make sure.

Quicker than a flash, though, before they could make any tests for themselves, Halstead shouted:

"Fine! Rush 'em quick, fellows! Jump on 'em and hold 'em down. Don't let either rascal get away!"

His voice was so joyous, so exultant, that it completely fooled the pair for an instant. Though the florid-faced one did not release the tightness of his grip on the young skipper's coat collar, he, like the swarthy one, used his eyes to look about in all directions.

That moment was enough for Tom Halstead, doubly quick-witted in his peril. His hands flew up the front of his uniform coat, ripping buttons

out of button holes at one swift move. Wrench! Tom slipped out of his coat, springing ahead under the trees.

"Here, you! Come back here!" roared the florid-faced one absurdly, as he plunged after the young fugitive. The swarthy one, too, joined in the chase, freeing himself of a torrent of Spanish words.

Tom Halstead had just a few seconds' start, aided by the darkness that enveloped them all. A hundred yards or so Tom dashed, rather noisily. Then, off at right angles to his former course he sped on tip-toe, nor did he go much more than fifty yards ere he landed up against a straight tree whose low-hanging limbs bore an abundant foliage.

Up this tree-trunk, without hesitation, shinned the young skipper, drawing himself well up among the leaves in what he felt must be record time for such a feat.

For a few moments more he could hear his pursuers stumbling along the wrong course. Then he knew, by the sounds, that they had turned back and were keeping well apart in the hope of covering more ground. But the uncertainty of their steps, however, told the boy up the tree that his pursuers were wholly off the trail and giving up the chase. Then, veering, the florid-faced man and the swarthy one came

toward each other. They halted almost squarely under the tree that held young Halstead.

Tom's first, throbbing thought was that they had tracked him here. He did not stir, but the grim lines around his mouth deepened. Let them try to get him then. They would have to climb the tree to get at him and he meant to make use of his hands and feet in defending himself.

"I can give them all they want for a while," he told himself between his teeth. In fact, in his excitement he all but made his remark half aloud.

"Well, he's got away from us, all right," growled the florid-faced one in a tone of mingled disappointment and rage.

"We shall at least know him well after this," sighed the swarthy one in a sinister tone.

"And I hope you'll have your wish," flared listening Tom indignantly, "though I'll try to control the time and place of meeting."

"I'd rather have lost a thousand dollars than that boy," went on the larger man gruffly.

"A thousand?" sneered the other. "*Diablo!* I'd give five thousand to have him in our hands this moment."

"And I believe I'd give more," echoed Tom silently, "to keep out of your clutches—if I had the money."

Then, drawing closely together, the pair conversed in whispers. Again Tom groaned over his hearing which, keen as it was, could get nothing connected from the low tones of the pair on the ground. Whatever they were saying, these plotters must be terribly in earnest over something. In his eagerness Tom bent too far forward. His foot slipped. Frantically he clutched at a branch overhead to save himself from plunging to the ground. Of course the move made some noise.

"*Diablo!* What was that? And so close, too!" demanded the smaller man.

"What?" demanded the larger man.

"That noise! Some one must be prowling about here," continued the swarthy one in a whisper just loud enough to reach Tom's ears.

As he spoke the Spaniard's head turned in such a way as to show that he was looking up into the tree in which Tom stood. It was becoming a truly bad quarter of an hour for the boy.

"I heard nothing," said the other one gruffly. "Leastways, nothing more than some night animal stirring, maybe."

"Let's make a search of these trees," proposed the Spaniard.

Tom shivered. Danger was again coming much too close to please him.

"Come along," rejoined the florid-faced one impatiently. "We're wasting too much time, listening to the whisperings of the wind. Come along, Alvarez."

After a brief objection the one addressed as Alvarez turned and stepped off with his friend. They had not gone far when Tom Halstead slipped down the tree trunk. Alarmed as he had been when danger threatened most, he now knew that he must follow them.

"For they may lead me straight to Ted Dunstan," he thought eagerly.

Naturally he did not think it wise to get too close to the pair. Captured again, Tom Halstead knew that he was not likely to be able to be of any further service to his employer. Besides, in escaping and leaving his coat in the hands of the enemy he now remembered how his white shirt might betray him if he got too close to them.

"It's a wonder they didn't see all this white when I was up in the tree," he muttered, as he stole along in pursuit. "The leaves must have covered me mighty well."

For perhaps five minutes Halstead kept steadily behind the pair, guiding himself by the distant sound of their steps, for they did not keep to any path. Then suddenly the boy halted. The noise of footsteps ahead had died

out. Tom stood, silent, expectant, but no sound came to his ears in the next two or three minutes. Then a disagreeable conclusion forced itself on the young skipper's mind.

"Gracious! They've slipped away from me or else they're at the end of their tramp."

Again Halstead stole forward on tiptoe. But, though he spent nearly the next half-hour in exploring, he found nothing to reward his search. He came at last to a road which he judged to be the same one along which he had started with the Spaniard. Taking his course from the stars, seaman fashion, Halstead kept along. Within ten minutes he was upon a road that looked like a highway.

"Say, but how good that sounds!" he thrilled, suddenly halting. He had the presence of mind next to slip behind the trunk of a big tree.

A horse was moving lazily along the road. There was the sound of wheels, too, though above all rose a cheery whistling, as though the owner of that pair of lips were the happiest mortal alive. It was a good, contented whistling. It had about it, too, the ring of honesty. The cheery sound made Tom Halstead feel faith at once in the owner of that whistle.

Then there came into sight a plain, much-worn open buggy, drawn by a sleek-looking gray horse. Seated in the vehicle was a youngster

of about Tom's own age, who looked much like a farmer's boy. He had no coat on, his suspenders being much in evidence. On his head he wore a nondescript, broad-brimmed straw hat of the kind used by haymakers. At least it looked as though it might once have been that sort of a hat, but its shape was gone. From where Halstead stood not much of a glimpse could be had of the boy's face.

"Good evening, friend," Tom hailed, stepping out from behind the tree.

"Evening! Who-o-oa!" The other boy reined up, peering down through the semidarkness. "Want a lift?"

"Just what, if it happens that you're headed toward the town of Nantucket," Tom replied.

"That's just where I'm headed. But hold on—gracious! I came within an ace of forgetting. I've got to turn back and drive to Sanderson's for a basket of eggs. Won't take me long, though. Pile in."

Tom gladly accepted the invitation. After his late experiences it seemed good to be again with some one who appeared to be wholesome and friendly. The other boy turned about, laying the whip lightly over the horse.

"Look as if you were off of some yacht," commented the other boy, noting Halstead's blue trousers and cap.

"I'm the skipper at present on Mr. Dunstan's 'Meteor,'" Tom explained.

"Say, that's the man whose son disappeared to-day," exclaimed the other boy.

"Then you've heard about it?"

"Yep; it's all over the island now, I guess. Constables been going everywhere and asking a heap of questions. Have they found young Ted?"

"I'm afraid not," sighed Tom.

"Too bad. But who could have wanted him to disappear?"

"That's a long story," Tom answered discreetly. "But say, where are you going?"

For the young driver was turning off the road to go to the very farmhouse to which the pier seemed to belong.

"To Sanderson's, as I told you," replied the other boy.

"Does that pier down at the water front belong to him?"

"Yep, though I guess he don't have much use for it."

"What sort of man is Sanderson?"

"Good enough sort, I guess."

"What does he do for a living?"

"He farms some, but I guess that don't amount to a lot," replied the young driver. "I hear he's going into some new kind of busi-

ness this fall. Some kind of a factory he's going to build on the place. I know he's been having a lot of cases of machinery come over on the boat from Wood's Hole lately."

"Machinery?" echoed Halstead. Somehow, from the first, that word struck a strange note within him.

"There's Sanderson, now," continued the young driver, pointing toward the house with his whip.

Then the buggy drew up alongside the back porch. Halstead had plenty of chance to study this farmer as he greeted the young driver:

"Hullo, Jed Prentiss. After them eggs?"

"Yes; and nearly forgot 'em."

"I reckoned you'd be along about now. Well, I'll get 'em."

Farmer Sanderson appeared to be about fifty years of age. He would have been rather tall if so much of his lanky height had not been turned over in a decided stoop of the shoulders. He had a rough, weather-beaten skin that seemed to match his rough jean overalls and flannel shirt. The most noticeable thing about this man was the keenness of his eyes. As the farmer came out again to put the basket of eggs in the back of the buggy Tom Halstead asked suddenly:

"Do you know a man who looks like a Span-

iard and wears brown striped trousers and a black coat?"

Farmer Sanderson, so the young captain thought, gave a slight start. Then he unconcernedly placed the basket in the buggy before he answered:

"Can't say as I *know* such a party. But I've seen a fellow that answered that description."

"When, if I may ask, and where?"

"Why, late this afternoon I saw such a party hanging around my pier. I s'posed he was fishing, but I didn't go down to ask any questions."

Tom put a few more queries, though without betraying too deep an interest. Farmer Sanderson answered with an appearance of utter frankness, but Tom learned nothing from the replies.

"I wonder," ventured Jed Prentiss, after they had driven some distance along the road, "whether you think your Spanish-looking party had anything to do with Ted Dunstan's being missing?"

Tom laughed good-naturedly, but made no reply, thinking that the easiest way of turning off the question.

"Say," broke in Jed again after a while, "I wish you could get me a job aboard the 'Meteor.'"

"What kind of a job?" inquired the young captain.

"Why, I'm generally handy aboard a boat. Been out on fishing craft a good deal. The job I struck Mr. Dunstan for, some weeks ago, was that of steward. You see, I'm a pretty fair sea cook, too. But Mr. Dunstan said he didn't need a steward or a cook aboard. I wonder if he'd change his mind."

"He might," replied Tom.

"Do you think you'd like to have me aboard?"

"From what I've seen of you, Jed, I think I would," replied Tom Halstead heartily. "At any rate, I'll speak to Mr. Dunstan about you."

"Will you, though?" cried Jed delightedly. "Say, I'd give my head—no, but the hair off the top of my head—to go cruising about on the 'Meteor.' It must be a king's life."

"It is," Tom assented.

Then, for some time, the two boys were silent. But at last Tom Halstead, after some intense thinking, burst out almost explosively:

"Machinery? Great Scott!"

"Er—eh?" queried Jed, looking at him in surprise.

"Oh, nothing," returned the young skipper evasively. "Just forget that you heard me say anything, will you?"

"Sure," nodded Jed obligingly. Soon after, they drove into the quaint little old seaport, summer-resort town, Nantucket. Tom's glance alighted on a bicycle shop, still open. Thanking Jed heartily for the lift, Halstead hurried into the shop. He succeeded in renting a bicycle, agreeing that it should be returned in the morning. Then, after some inquiries as to the road, Tom set out, pedaling swiftly.

He got off the road once, but in the end found the Dunstan place all right. At the gateway to the grounds Halstead dismounted. For a few moments he stood looking up at the house, only a part of which was lighted.

"Machinery?" repeated the young skipper to himself, for the twentieth time. "Machinery? Eh? Oh, but we want to know all about that, and, what's more, we've got to know. Machinery! It pieces in with some other facts that have come out to-day."

Then mindful of the fact that the news he bore was, or should be, of great importance to the distracted master of the house beyond, Tom Halstead, instead of remounting, pushed his wheel along as he walked briskly up the driveway.

"Machinery!" he muttered once more under his breath. He could not rid himself of the magic of that word.

Yet it was a huge pity that the young motor boat captain could not have possessed sharp enough vision to see into the heart of a dense clump of lilac bushes that bordered the driveway. Had his vision been that keen he would have seen his very Spaniard crouched low in the clump.

That worthy saw the boy and watched him with baleful, gleaming eyes. It was a look that boded no good to the young skipper.

"You are too wise, young *gringo,* and, besides, you have struck me down," growled Alvarez. "But we shall take care of you. You shall do no more harm!"

CHAPTER VII

"THE QUICKEST WAY OF WALKING THE PLANK"

IT was Tuesday when Ted Dunstan disappeared. Now, Saturday had arrived. On Monday the heir must appear, with his father, in the probate court, or the great fortune would be forever lost to the young man.

The days from Tuesday to Saturday had been full of suspense and torment to those most interested. Horace Dunstan had lost his easy-going air. He started at the slightest sound; he hurried up whenever he heard others

talking. Every new sound gave him hope that his son was about to appear in the flesh.

Far from slow had the search been. Mr. Dunstan's messages had brought a score of detectives to the scene. Some of these, aided by the local constables, had scoured the island of Nantucket unavailingly. The greater number of the detectives, however, had operated on the mainland, their operations extending even to Boston and New York.

Yet not a sign of the missing boy had been found. There was not a single clew to his fate, beyond the little that Tom Halstead and Joe Dawson had been able to tell concerning Alvarez and the florid-faced American.

Halstead's notion about Farmer Sanderson's "machinery" had crystallized into the belief that the cases of "machinery" received by the farmer were in reality cases of arms and ammunition, intended to be shipped to aid some new revolution in Honduras. Alvarez and the florid-faced man, the latter undoubtedly a seafaring man, might justly be suspected of being employed in some scheme to smuggle military supplies to Honduras. Tom had read in the newspapers, more than once, that filibusters sending military supplies to Central American republics label their cases of goods "machinery" in order to get past vigilant eyes unsus-

pected. Gregory Dunstan was known to be interested in revolutionary movements, and Farmer Sanderson might be suspected of helping Alvarez and other filibusters by having arms and ammunition shipped to him as machinery, and afterwards slipped out of the country from the end of the farmer's pier on some dark, stormy night. Moreover, Gregory Dunstan and his friends were the sole ones who could be interested in having Master Ted vanish at such a time. All parts of the theory fitted nicely together, Tom thought, and Horace Dustan agreed with him.

Yet anything relating to attempts by filibusters to ship arms secretly to another country should be brought to the notice of the United States Government. So Mr. Dunstan wrote fully to the authorities at Washington, who, so far, had not taken the pains to reply to his communication.

During these days the "Meteor" had been almost constantly in service. Tom and Joe felt nearly used up, so incessant had been their work. Jed Prentiss was now aboard, for, with detectives arriving and departing at all hours, there was frequently need of serving a visitor with a meal while the "Meteor" dashed over the waves to or from Nantucket. Jed was enjoying himself despite his long hours and hard

work. He even found time to hang about Joe and learn much about the running of the motor.

By Saturday noon Horace Dunstan, who seemed to have aged much, gave up the notion that his detectives could aid him at Nantucket. The last three on the island were sent over to Wood's Hole on the "Meteor," with instructions to help the men at work on the case on the mainland.

"Thank goodness, we're through with 'em," grunted Jed, leaving the galley and coming up through the engine room hatchway. "I hope we'll get a breathing spell to-morrow."

"We've had a brisk four days of it," nodded Tom. "I wouldn't mind that at all, if only we had gotten any nearer to finding Ted. But all this work and nothing gained is enough to wear a fellow out."

It was a part of Tom's nature that he felt keenly all of his employer's worries over the missing Ted. It worried Halstead, too, to think of any boy hopelessly losing such a huge fortune as was at stake.

"If only we could find Alvarez, and get a good grip on him," growled Halstead, as Joe came up on deck, "I'd feel almost warranted in torturing him until he told all he knew."

Joe nodded gravely, then suddenly grinned.

"I can imagine anyone as big-hearted as you are, Tom, putting any human being to the torture."

"I said I'd *almost* be willing to," insisted Tom.

"Well, you won't find Alvarez, so what's the use of arguing?" asked Dawson, slowly. "He and his red-faced friend have skipped away from this part of the country, I believe."

"And Mr. Dunstan has only until Monday," sighed Halstead. "And Ted to lose millions! Did you ever hear of a case of such tough luck before?"

Jed began to whistle sympathetically. He, too, would have given worlds to be able to pounce upon the vanished Ted. For young Prentiss was all loyalty. Having entered the Dunstan employ, he felt all the sorrows of the family. The more he thought about the affair the more restless the whistling boy became.

"How long are we tied up here for?" demanded Jed, at last.

"Until the late afternoon train gets in from Boston," Tom answered, listlessly. "Mr. Dunstan is expecting Mr. Crane, his lawyer, along. If Mr. Crane doesn't arrive we've got to come over again to-morrow morning."

Jed glanced at the clock before the steering wheel.

"Hours to wait," he went on, dismally. "Well, I'm going ashore to stretch my legs, if there's no objection."

"None at all," Halstead replied, "if you're back on time."

Jed was over the rail in no time, whistling as he went. A few minutes later Tom Halstead found himself bored by this inactive waiting, and so, as Joe had some cleaning to do on the engine, the young skipper decided to take a stroll ashore.

In the village all looked so decidedly dull, this hot July afternoon, that Tom walked on through and beyond the little place. After he had gone the better part of a mile he seated himself on a tumble-down bit of stone wall between two big trees. It was cool here, and shady. The drone of insects soon made the boy feel drowsy.

"Here, there mustn't be any of this," muttered Halstead, shaking himself awake. "I mustn't fail to get back to the boat on time."

After that he was wide awake. But the green, the quiet and the cool air made the young captain feel that he did not care to leave this spot until it was necessary. For perhaps fifteen minutes more he sat chewing at a wisp of grass and thinking—always of the missing heir.

Then the sound of a short little cough made him look up. Some one was coming along the road. That some one came in sight. Almost choking with astonishment, Halstead went backward over the wall. It looked as though he had fallen, but it was all part of his frantic wish to get out of sight.

"Alvarez, by all that's unbelievable!" he gasped, as he lay utterly still behind that wall. "It doesn't look like him, but it's his size, his carriage, his walk, his little tickling cough as he inhales his cigarette!"

The man was coming nearer, walking at a steady though not rapid gait. Tom hugged himself as close to the ground as he could, peering between two stones in the wall. For an instant, as the other went by, Halstead had a good glimpse of the fellow. Where Alvarez had but a moustache, this man had a full black beard. Gone were the brown striped trousers, for this man wore a blue serge suit. But the face was swarthy; there was the same gleam in the dark eyes. Even the way of holding the fuming little cigarette was the same.

"It's Alvarez, or his double, disguised," breathed Halstead, frantic with joy. "I'll jump on him, and pin him to the earth!"

On swift second thought the excited boy changed his mind. It might serve a far bigger

purpose to follow this swarthy little rascal, if he could do so undetected.

Alvarez, apparently, wasn't suspicious of being trailed, for he kept steadily on. Halstead followed on the other side of the wall, ready to drop out of sight at the first sign of the other's turning. When the wall ended the boy found other shelter, and followed on. It was but a short chase. A quarter of a mile further on the Spaniard left the road, pushing his way through the bushes and undergrowth of a patch of woods until he came to a small, almost hidden cove. And in this cove, her stern within stepping distance of the land, lay a yellow-hulled steam launch.

Tom sank low behind the bushes, and peered through. He could see all that followed.

"Pedro!" called Alvarez, softly.

A man who had been dozing up in a seat by the bow of the boat now awoke and turned, displaying the face of a negro. He was a big and strong built fellow. And Tom, the instant he heard that low call from the bearded stranger, knew it to be Alvarez's voice.

Pedro hurried to the stern. Some talk between the two followed, but in tones so low that Halstead could understand not a word of it, until the Spaniard, half turning away, finished by saying:

"I'll be back soon. Be ready—and be watchful."

The negro nodded heavily as the Spaniard started away. But this time Tom Halstead made no effort to follow the swarthy one. If the Spaniard was to return, that would not be necessary.

"I wonder how fast I can return to Nantucket, and then be ready to chase this craft when she shows her nose outside?" wondered the boy. "For it's five to one this launch will make for Alvarez's hiding-place, and that is where Ted Dunstan is to be found. Yet—confound it all! —if I give chase in the 'Meteor,' Alvarez certainly won't lead us to the place."

It was a puzzling, an immense problem. And whatever was to be done must be decided upon instantly. While Halstead still pondered, a cheering sound came to his ears. "Whirr-ugh! Whirr-ugh!" The negro, in his former seat at the bow of the launch had proved his watchfulness by going sound asleep and snoring!

"Oh! If I could only get through to Alvarez's hiding-place on *this* boat!" thought Tom wildly, his breath coming hard and fast. No time was to be wasted in doing nothing. Assuring himself that the negro was still soundly asleep, Halstead stepped forward, cat-footed.

Still the black guardian of the boat slum-

bered. Tom, as he reached the water's edge, prayed that nothing would disturb the fellow's sleep. The launch was not a cabin affair, but there was a covered deck at the bow, and, under it, a hatchway leading into a little cubby. As the negro sat sleeping, his legs crossed squarely before the entrance to that cubby. Then Halstead edged around until he made sure that there was another little cubby under the stern-sheets of the launch.

"If I could only get in there and hide!" breathed the young skipper, fervently. Hardly had he formed the wish when he stepped stealthily to the boat. His eyes watchfully on the negro, Tom gained the stern hatch. He bent down before it to inspect the space beyond. The space in there was small, and much of it taken up by the propeller shaft boxing. It looked like taking a desperate chance to try to fold himself up in that tiny space.

"But this is a time to take desperate chances!" gritted the young motor boat captain. "And it's the only chance I see that looks good!"

Another glance at the snoring negro, and Tom Halstead stealthily worked his feet in through the hatchway. His body followed. He twisted and wriggled until he had got himself as far back into the limited space as was possi-

ble. His head was where he could gaze out into the cockpit of the launch.

"I know just what a sardine feels like, anyway, after the packer gets through with it," reflected the boy, dryly. He stretched a little, to avoid as much as possible the cramping of his body.

Then he had a wait of many minutes, though at last the hail of Alvarez was heard from the shore. It took a second call to rouse the sleeping Pedro.

"Now, quick out of this," ordered the Spaniard. "Get up the anchor. Then take your place by the engine."

Alvarez himself went forward to the wheel at the bow. The launch was soon under way, moving at what appeared to be its usual speed, about six miles an hour.

"Neither one has seen me in here," thought Tom, tensely. "Oh, what huge luck if they go through the trip without seeing me!"

Though Halstead could not even guess it, from where he lay, the launch took a northeasterly course along the coast, and was presently about two miles from shore.

"Pedro," chuckled the Spaniard, at last, looking back at the negro who squatted by the engine, "if my own father saw me now would he know me for Emilio Alvarez? Would he?"

"He'd be a wondahful smart man if he did, fo' shuah," grinned the negro.

"In this disguise I would hardly be afraid to walk about in Nantucket," continued Señor Alvarez. "I doubt if any of my enemies would recognize me. They——"

Alvarez's lips shut suddenly with a snap. While he was speaking he had been looking astern. Tom Halstead now squirmed as he saw the Spaniard's startled gaze fixed directly on him.

"Pedro!" shouted the swarthy one. "Look sharp, man. There's some one in that cubby astern!"

Alvarez had started himself to leave the wheel. Then, realizing that the boat would run wild without some one at the helm, he pointed dramatically.

Though Halstead had trusted to the darkness and the shadow in that cubby, the discovery that he dreaded had happened. Not willing to be caught in there, like a fox in a trap, he made a lively scramble to get out. He was on his feet in the cockpit by the time that Pedro, staring as though at a ghost, leaped up and faced him.

"Grab the boy!" shouted Alvarez in glee. "Nab him and hold him fast. Pedro, you shall have a present for this!"

As Halstead scrambled out he had looked for

some object with which to defend himself. There was nothing at hand. He was obliged to face his bigger assailant with nothing but his fists.

"Keep off!" warned Halstead, throwing up his guard.

As the negro leaped for him Tom shot out his left fist, landing on the side of the black man's head. The blow had no effect, save that it angered Pedro, who struck out with his own right. It was a powerful blow. Halstead dodged so that he received it only glancingly, but the act of dodging threw him off his balance. He toppled, then plunged swiftly overboard, sinking from sight.

"Stop the engine! I want him alive!" screamed Alvarez, leaping away from the wheel.

Pedro responded swiftly, stopping the speed, then reversing the engine briefly. The launch was brought to, almost stationary, close to the place where Tom Halstead had fallen overboard.

"Get the boat hook," commanded Alvarez. "Jump in after him if necessary. I want that meddling boy. I've a score to settle with him."

But, though both remained at the rail for some time, peering down into the water, Tom Halstead did not reappear.

"Fo' goodness' sake," chattered the black

man soberly, "dat boy done sink, fo' shuah. He ain't gwine come back, boss."

"The propeller must have struck him on the head," declared Alvarez thoughtfully. Then, with a white face and an attempt at a light laugh, he added:

"After all, what does it matter, Pedro? That's the quickest way of walking the plank. We didn't mean to drown him—but we're rid of his meddling!"

CHAPTER VIII

TOM DISCOVERS THE HEIR

TOM HALSTEAD wasn't drowned—not quite. The wicked seldom find safety in believing that their evil work has come out in the way that will most benefit them. We shall presently see what *did* happen to Tom.

Although he tried to pretend that he was not affected by the tragedy that he believed had just been enacted, Señor Alvarez, when he returned to his seat by the wheel, did not at once call for speed ahead. Instead he rolled a fresh cigarette with trembling fingers, spilling so much of the tobacco that he had to make a fresh start. When, at last, he had the thing lighted and had

taken a couple of whiffs, he turned to the black man to ask:

"After all, Pedro, what difference can it make if the meddling boy chose the ocean to our company? Am I not a gentleman of Honduras, Don Emilio Alvarez? Am I not descended from Spanish grandees? Why should I bother my head because one of the American riff-raff has gone overboard?"

"Dat's a fac', boss. Why should yo' bother yo' haid?" responded Pedro, though he did not say it very heartily.

Don Emilio smoked for some moments in silence. Then the sight of a cabin sloop rounding a point of land to the northeast of them claimed his attention.

"Pedro," he called, pointing, "that sloop carries the red jack fluttering from her bowsprit tip. That, then, is our boat."

"Fo' shuah, boss. An' I done hope dat Cap'n Jonas French done got some good news ob de kind dat we wanter heah."

"Give us some speed and we'll soon be alongside the sloop."

The launch was soon going along at her usual speed of some six miles an hour, veering in shore somewhat to cross the course of the sloop. As they came to close quarters a voice from the other boat called:

"The news is all right, Alvarez."

It was the voice of the florid-faced one, yet he, too, had changed almost as much as had the gentleman from Honduras. Captain French's cheeks were no longer deep red in color. His skin had more of a bronze hue. As such changes do not occur naturally within a few days, it was evident that the captain must have employed some dye with much skill. Even the tint of his hair was changed.

"I have something to discuss with you, my friend," replied Don Emilio. "I will come aboard for a while. Throw off your mainsheet and lie to, so that I can come alongside."

Pedro slowed down the speed considerably. Don Emilio, with a skill that spoke of some practice, ran the launch around to leeward and up under the sloop's quarter. The two craft touched lightly and at that instant Alvarez stepped aboard the sloop. Pedro, with his hand on the starboard wheel rope, eased gently away from the sailing sloop.

"Now run into the cove, Pedro," called back Don Emilio. "Wait there until I come to you, unless danger threatens. If you see signs of trouble, act in whatever way you may need to act."

"I'se understand yo', boss," replied the black man.

As Captain Jonas French hauled in his mainsheet and the sloop's sail filled, Pedro made obliquely for shore. Having no need of speed, he made less demand on the engine than he had been doing.

Some time later Pedro ran halfway into a little cove that dented the mainland of Massachusetts. Stopping the speed he stepped forward and cast over an anchor, reeling in the slack and making fast. This done, the darky drew out an old pipe, filled it and lighted it, settling back for a lazy smoke.

And Tom Halstead? He was doing his best not to pant and betray himself, but his had been a rough experience. None but a boy as much at home in the water as on land could have stood the strain of this performance.

When Tom went overboard, striking the water, the cold shock had aroused all his faculties. He went over the starboard gunwale and, finding himself going, had had the sense to dive as deeply as he could. He passed under the hull, coming out at port. Then he turned, keeping still under water until one of his hands touched the port side of the hull.

Just as this happened Halstead's other hand struck a line trailing in the water. Then the boy was forced to come up for air. As he did so he heard the voices of the pair aboard over

at the starboard gunwale. That gave Tom a safe chance to give the trailing rope a pull. It held, showing that it was made fast on board.

Necessity makes one think fast. To Tom the discovery of this rope was a most unexpected bit of good fortune. As soon as he had time to get his breath he tied a loop in it securely. Through this he could thrust one or both arms, at need.

The trailing overboard of a line in this fashion was a piece of disorderly ship's housekeeping of which an American skipper would hardly be guilty. But the sailors of the Latin races are less particular. That line might have been over the gunwale for hours or even days, but a man like Alvarez would give little heed to it.

When the launch went on her way again Tom had his right arm hooked well through the loop. He floated, his feet astern along the side, though in no danger from rudder or propeller. His head, out of water, was hidden by the bulging lines of the launch's side hull. He was not likely to be discovered unless one of the occupants of the launch leaned well out and looked down.

"If only they'd run a little slower this would be about as easy as lying in a soft bed," chuckled the young motor boat captain gleefully. He had grinned broadly at Don Emilio's seeming unconcern over his fate.

"I reckon where they go I'm going too," Halstead told himself with great satisfaction. His clothing, filled with water, would have been uncomfortable, even dangerous, had he attempted to swim far, but as it was the launch's engine was doing all the work. Tom simply allowed his rather buoyant body to be towed. None the less the speed of the towing, so greatly in excess of a swimmer's speed, began to tell upon his endurance. Later that cabin sloop was briefly in the boy's sight. Halstead was forced to lower his head all he could in the water, but Captain French, having no reason to scan the launch's water line, did not happen to detect the strange "tow." As the two boats went alongside it was the launch's starboard bow that touched, so that Tom, at port, was in no danger of being seen from the other craft.

Nor was the young motor boat captain again in sight after the two craft parted. Pedro's slower speed, making for the cove, came as a huge relief to the "boy overboard."

While the anchor was being dropped, Halstead had opportunity to see how wild and deserted a bit of nature the surroundings were. There was not a house or other sign of human habitation anywhere in sight.

While Pedro sat up forward, smoking, a voice

sounded that thrilled Captain Tom Halstead with instant wonder.

"Hullo, Pedro! What a nap I must have had."

"Yo' shuahly did sleep fast, chile."

"I'm coming out, now."

"Ef yo' do, young boss, be kyahful," warned the black man.

"Oh, there's no one around here to see me," contended that other voice, and now it sounded as though the owner were in the bow of the craft.

"Ef Ah done thought Ah could trust yo' Ah'd tuhn in in dat forrad cubby mahself," declared the negro. "Ah's powahful drowsy."

"Go ahead, Pedro," agreed the other speaker. "You needn't be afraid of me. I'll keep a bright lookout."

There was the sound of the negro stowing himself away in the forward cubby, much roomier than the one Tom had tried at the stern.

Halstead had heard the conversation with a feeling at first as though his brain were whirling inside his head. The long dousing in the water was beginning to make itself felt in a chill, but it was not wholly this that made the young skipper shake.

"That's Ted Dunstan's voice," he told him-

self, trembling. "He's on board this very craft. I've found the missing Dunstan heir."

Soon Pedro's snores could be heard. Then Tom Halstead hauled himself up along the rope until he could just peer over the gunwale. His last doubt vanished; he could no longer question his ears, for now his glance fastened upon the living heir of the Dunstans!

CHAPTER IX

TED HURLS A THUNDERBOLT

THE youngest of the Dunstans was sitting where Pedro had been seated only a short time before. Ted held a book in his hands, his gaze fixed on one of the pages.

"He's playing crafty," thought Tom. "He's waiting until he's sure that black man is sound, sound asleep. Then he'll make his dash for freedom. Oh, if he only knew how close a friend is!"

"Whirr-ugh!" Pedro's snore smote heavily on the air.

"He'll sleep now, as only a colored man can sleep," thought Tom jubilantly. "There's only just one time to do this thing, and that's now! Here goes to let Ted Dunstan know that help is right at hand."

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Yet Tom's teeth were threatening so persistently to chatter that he had to hold his jaws firmly together for a moment before he dared attempt a slight signal.

"Pss-sst!" It was a low signal indeed. Ted Dunstan half raised his gaze from the printed page, then glanced down again.

"Whirr-rr-ugh!" came the noisy safety-signal from Pedro.

Tom ventured to raise his head a trifle higher above the port gunwale.

"Pss-sst! pss-sst!" he hissed desperately.

Ted Dunstan looked up now, his glance traveling swiftly astern. Then he caught sight of the eager face of the "Meteor's" young skipper. At sight of the peeper's face the Dunstan heir's face was a study in amazement. At first he just stared, as though suddenly in a daze.

"Come here!" whispered Tom ever so softly.

Ted laid his book down, shot a swift, uncertain glance at the cubby in which Pedro lay, then rose uncertainly. Tom hauled himself up, perching himself on the gunwale.

"Be quick and silent about it," whispered Tom, as Ted reached him and stood staring with all his might. "Can you swim?"

"Why?" demanded Ted curtly, and not exactly in a whisper, either.

"If you can we'll be ashore in a jiffy," Halstead responded eagerly.

"Ashore?" demanded Ted.

"Why, of course. I've come to rescue you. There's nothing to fear if you're quick about it. But be lively. If you can't swim, then just slip down into the water and trust yourself to me. I'll manage it for both of us. Be quick about it, though, for every minute counts."

"There's some mistake, somewhere," pronounced Ted, a decided coldness in his tone.

"Mistake?" echoed Halstead, as though the other had struck him. "What do you mean, Ted? Don't you remember me? I'm in charge of your father's motor boat. I've been looking for you for days, and now you can escape."

"But I don't want to escape," declared Master Ted coolly, almost sneeringly. "Besides, there's nothing to escape from."

"Nothing to escape from?" echoed Tom aghast. "Why, Ted Dunstan, you simply can't know what you're saying. Look how this crowd have used you."

"Well, then, how have they used me?" Ted challenged coolly. "I am having the time of my life."

"The time of your—— Say, Ted Dunstan, have you any idea how nearly crazy your father is over your absence?"

"That's strange," mocked the Dunstan heir. "My father knows perfectly well where I am, and just why, too."

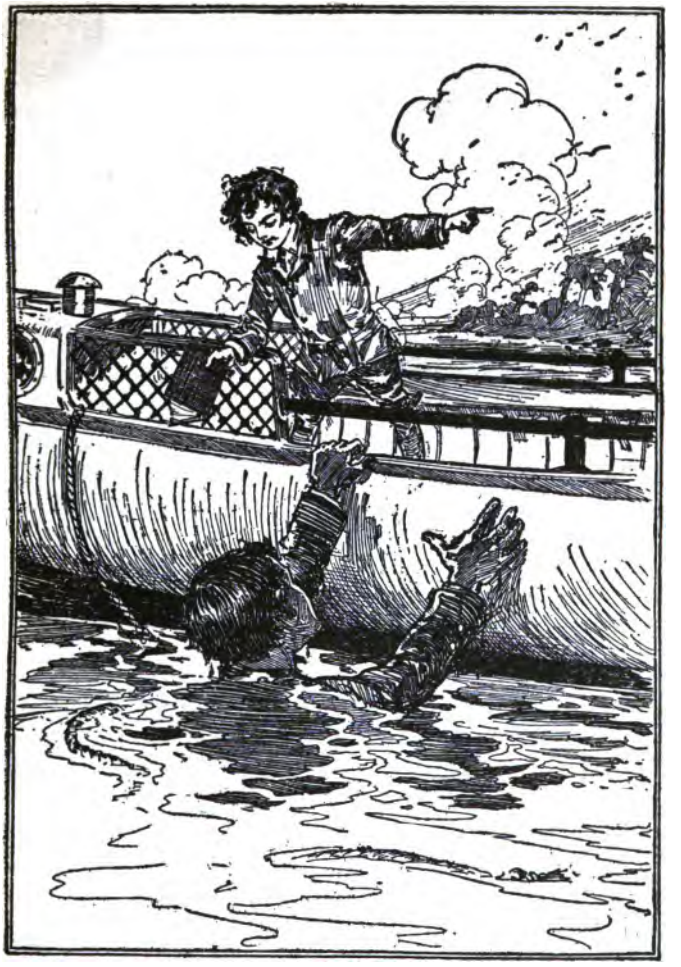
This was uttered so candidly that Halstead wondered if he had taken leave of his own senses. There could be no doubt at all that young Dunstan believed every word he was uttering.

"Your father knows you're here?" Tom insisted questioningly.

"Of course he does. It's by his orders that I am here and that I am keeping quiet. And now, clear out. I've talked to you more than is right. I know what you and your chum are—a pair of slippery eels!"

"You say your father knows—— You say he ordered you——" Tom went on vaguely. "Ted Dunstan, do you think you're telling the truth or anything like it? And who on earth should you——"

"Clear out of this," ordered the Dunstan heir firmly. "I don't like to see you get into any trouble, but I'm not going to listen to you any longer. My father can tell you about this, if he has a mind to. I've no right to talk about it and I won't. Now if you can swim as well as you say you can, prove it and reach shore on the double-quick. Pedro! Pedro! Wake up! Now you git, Halstead!"



"Clear Out of This!" Ordered the Dunstan Heir.

"But Ted——" persisted the dumfounded young skipper.

"Well, stay, then, and let Pedro get his hands on you," defied the Dunstan heir. "Pedro! Aren't you going to wake up?"

"Coming, chile," sounded a drowsy voice, followed by the noise of heavy movements.

Dazed, thunderstruck, his mind wholly befuddled by this astounding turn to the mystery, Tom Halstead did not linger. He knew too well what was likely to happen to him if he fell into Pedro's hands.

Slipping over the side, Tom cast off from the rope, striking out strongly, swiftly for the shore which was distant not more than one hundred and fifty feet.

"That's him!" cried Ted Dunstan, pointing, and forgetting his grammar in his excitement. "That's one of those slippery boys. He had the cheek to say he had come to rescue me."

"He did, hey? Huh! I'se gwine fix him!" uttered the black man savagely. "Jest yo' wait, chile, twell I'se bring out dat shotgun."

"Oh, no, no, Pedro! Not that!" pleaded Ted in sudden dismay and terror.

But Pedro dived back into the forward cubby. All this conversation the young motor boat captain had heard, for it passed in no low tones. Just as Pedro reached the cubby Tom scrambled

up on the beach. Before him were the deep woods. In among the trees he plunged. The instant he was satisfied that he was out of sight of the launch, he turned at right angles, speeding swiftly for some hundred and fifty yards. Then he halted to listen.

"Where he done gone?" demanded Pedro, reappearing on deck, gripping a double-barreled shotgun.

"I'm not going to tell you," retorted Ted sulkily. "Shooting is not in the game."

Tom heard the murmur of the voices—nothing more. A minute later he heard the steady chug! chug! of the launch's steam engine as that craft started. Then the noise ceased as the craft got smoothly under way. But Halstead was up a tree, now, where he could watch.

"Heading out to sea, are you?" he chuckled, despite his great anxiety. "And in a six-mile boat. Hm! I think the 'Meteor' can overtake you and at least keep you in sight. For that matter, three boys can fight better than one!"

Tom didn't linger up the tree to think all that. Ere he had finished speaking to himself he was down on the ground, making speedily for where he judged the road to be. As he came in sight of the road he heard another chug! chug! that made his heart bound with delighted hope.

"Hi, there! Stop there, please!" shouted the

young motor boat captain, waving his arms as he sighted a touring car headed toward the village.

There was only the chauffeur on the front seat and an elderly man in the tonneau. The chauffeur glanced back at this other man, then slowed down the auto.

"If you're going into Wood's Hole, take me with you?" begged Tom so earnestly that the older man swung open the door, saying crisply: "Jump in!"

Nor did Halstead lose a second. He plumped down into the seat by the door and the car was off again, going at some twenty miles an hour.

"I hope you won't mind my wet clothes in your car," hinted Tom apologetically. "I got a big drenching in the ocean and there was neither chance nor time to make a change."

"You're in a hurry to get to the village, eh?" smiled the elderly man.

"In as big a hurry as I ever was to get anywhere," breathed Halstead fervently. The elderly man smiled, though he evidently was not curious, for he asked no further questions. Halstead sat there delightedly watching the distance fade. Even to his anxious mind the trip seemed a brief, speedy one. As the car ran in by the railway station Halstead saw the late afternoon train slowly backing down the

track. It had been in, then, for three or four minutes.

"Thank you, thank you!" breathed Tom fervently, as he threw open the door to leap out, then closing it behind him. "You haven't any idea what a huge favor you've done me."

"I'm glad I've been able to be of some use in the world to-day," laughed the old gentleman pleasantly.

But Tom, bounding across the tracks and over the ground, hardly heard him. The young skipper had but one thought at this moment—to get aboard and have his craft under way at the earliest possible second.

As Halstead neared the pier he saw Joe and Jed seated on the deckhouse, while Mr. Crane, the Dunstan lawyer, arrived on the train, was walking along over the boards.

"Joe, get the engine started on a hustle!" bellowed Tom, using both hands to form a trumpet. "Jed, on the pier with you and stand by the stern-line, ready to cast off!"

Both boys leaped to obey such crisp commands. Lawyer Crane, having reached the boat, turned on the pier to look inquiringly at the racing young skipper.

"Get aboard, sir, as quickly as you can, if you please," requested the young skipper all but breathlessly.

"May I inquire——" began the lawyer slowly.

"Yes, sir; when we're under way. But we haven't a second to lose in starting. Get aboard, sir, if you please."

In his eagerness Tom almost shoved the legal gentleman over the side. Mr. Crane, not a little astonished at the hasty procedure, looked as though about to resent such treatment, but fortunately changed his mind.

Tom himself seized the bowline and threw off. He and Jed sprang aboard, fore and aft, at about the same instant. The "Meteor's" engine was already chugging merrily.

"Slow speed ahead, Joe," bellowed down Captain Tom, and the "Meteor" swung gracefully out. "Now work her up to good speed," he called, a few moments later. "We're on the grand old chase!"

CHAPTER X

OVERHAULING THE MYSTERY

"AND now," demanded Lawyer Crane, in his calm, heavy voice, "may I ask what all this chaos and confusion is about?"

"In just a minute or two, sir, I'll be hugely

delighted to have you listen," Halstead answered. "But I want to get out of this cove and clear of coast shoals and ledges first."

Joe had already begun to make the engine "kick" somewhat, and the boat was moving fast, leaving behind her a graceful swirl of water. Jed, after coiling the stern-line, had come forward, and, though he asked no questions, that youth was whistling a ditty of fast movement, the surest sign of all that he shared in the unknown excitement.

"There she is!" cried Halstead, suddenly, taking his right hand from the wheel to point out over the water.

"She?" repeated Mr. Crane. "Who?"

"That boat! Don't you see the steam launch with the yellow hull?"

The launch was some two or more miles away, heading over the waters in a direction that would carry her past the northern end of Martha's Vineyard. Mr. Crane adjusted his glasses, staring hard. At last he made out the low-lying hull.

"I see some sort of a craft out there," he replied slowly. "But I must congratulate you on having very good eyes, Captain Halstead, if you can make out the fact that she is painted yellow. However, what have we to do with that boat?"

"We're going after her," responded Tom, briefly. He was wondering just how to begin the wonderful story of his late adventure.

"Going after her?" repeated Mr. Crane, in slow astonishment. "Why, I was under the impression that your present task related to carrying me over to Mr. Dunstan's home."

"That comes next," replied Tom. "Mr. Crane, hardly twenty minutes ago I was aboard yonder boat, and was talking with Master Ted Dunstan."

The lawyer gasped, then rejoined, slowly:

"That's a most remarkable statement, to say the least."

But Joe Dawson and Jed Prentiss, who knew Halstead better, were staring at him with eyes wide open and mouths almost agape.

"I saw Ted Dunstan," repeated Tom, firmly. "Moreover, he gave me the jolt of my life."

"Did he incidentally throw you overboard?" asked the lawyer, eyeing Tom's wet garments. The sun and wind had dried the first great surplus of water out of them, but they were still undeniably more than damp.

"That was all part of the experience," Halstead answered, annoyed by the impression that the lawyer thought him trying to spin a mere sailor's yarn. "Do you care to hear what happened, sir?"

"Why, yes, assuredly, captain."

Tom reeled the story off rapidly. The lawyer gasped once or twice, but certainly the young skipper's wet clothing gave much of an appearance of truth to the "yarn."

"And now, sir, what do you think of Master Ted's claim that he was having the time of his life, and was hiding by his father's orders?" Tom wound up, inquiringly.

"Really, I shall have to think it all over," replied the lawyer cautiously. "And I shall be much interested in hearing what Mr. Dunstan has to say about it all."

"Say, that's queer," broke in Joe, suddenly, staring hard at the launch, now not much more than half a mile distant.

"What is?" asked Halstead, who had kept his mind on what he was telling the lawyer.

"That launch is following an almost straight course. Yet I don't see a soul at the wheel, nor a sign of a human being aboard," Joe replied.

"Say, there isn't anyone in sight, is there?" demanded Jed, stopping his whistling and staring the harder.

"It will certainly complicate the adventure," commented Lawyer Crane, "if we overhaul a craft navigated by unseen hands."

Halstead didn't say any more. He didn't

like the half-skepticism of the legal gentleman. The young skipper held straight on until they were astern of the yellow-hulled launch and coming up on the windward quarter.

"Get out on the deck forward, Jed," directed Halstead. "Stand up as straight as you can, and get the best look possible as I run up close. See if you can spot anyone hiding in the boat."

"Look out," cautioned Joe Dawson, dryly, as Jed Prentiss started to obey. "Someone on the other craft may open fire."

Jed halted, rather uneasily, at that sinister suggestion. Then, meeting Tom's firm glance, the boy got well forward and stood up, while Joe dropped down into the engine room to meet any order that might come about stopping speed.

"I hardly fancy anyone aboard that boat would dare threaten us with firearms," said the lawyer, slowly. "There are too many witnesses here to risk such a serious breach of the law."

"Hm!" chuckled Captain Tom grimly, to himself. "I wonder if this learned gentleman imagines that everyone has the wholesome respect for the law that possesses him?"

He leaned forward, to reach the bell-grip, steering, after the "Meteor's" headway had

been all but stopped, so that they would pass within a dozen feet of this mysterious craft.

"Say," hailed back Jed, "I don't believe there's a soul on board that craft. I can see the bottom of the inside of the boat."

"Get the boat-hook, then," ordered Halstead. "We'll lay alongside and make sure that she's deserted."

Jed jumped down nimbly. Apparently he was glad to provide himself with so handy a weapon as the boat-hook. With this he stepped out forward again. Tom ran the Meteor in until the two craft almost bumped.

"Ugh!" grunted Jed. "It looks almost uncanny to see that engine pumping right along with no sign of human care."

Gradually he drew the bow of the moving launch closer.

"Go aboard," directed Tom.

Jed stood up high on his toes, to take a last careful look. Then he leaped to the other craft, bounding down into her cockpit. There he stood still for a few moments, tightly gripping the boat-hook in an exaggerated attitude of defence.

"Are you afraid?" hailed Halstead.

"Well," admitted Jed, candidly, "I've no notion for being pounced on or shot from ambush."

"That would have happened already, if it was going to," Tom rejoined with a smile. "Stop the engine, and then we'll make fast and all come on board."

That Jed accomplished with one hand, while Joe did the same with the "Meteor's" engine. Then Prentiss reached over with the boat-hook, gradually hauling the smaller craft up to the "Meteor."

Leaving Joe behind on deck, the young skipper followed into the launch. A quick search made it plain that there was no human being in either the forward or after cubby.

"The wheel was spiked," discovered Tom. "You see, the boat was started on her course and then her spiked wheel held her rather close to it. Whoever was aboard, after having fixed wheel and engine, got off. This was done to fool us, and we've had a fine old chase."

Lawyer Crane, on the deck of the "Meteor," opened his mouth. He was about to offer an opinion, but thought better of it and closed his lips.

"Mr. Crane," asked Tom, after a few moments, "what are our rights? We can take this abandoned boat in tow, can't we, and take her over to Mr. Dunstan's pier?"

"Clearly," assented the lawyer, slowly. "And there's a right to salvage if the

owner of this derelict appears and claims the boat."

Tom clambered back aboard the "Meteor," and, going aft, threw a line to Jed, who made fast around a butt at the bow of the launch. Then Jed came back.

"Now, Mr. Crane," smiled Captain Tom, "we are again at your orders. Unless you think of something better, we can keep on to Nantucket."

"Decidedly," replied the lawyer. "We must acquaint Mr. Dunstan with this whole prepos—unaccountable story."

As soon as the "Meteor" was well under way, on her homeward course, Halstead called down:

"Joe, I've stood this drenched clothing as long as I think is good for me in this sea wind. Take the wheel, please, and I'll go below and get a rub and some dry clothing."

"I'm going down with you," broke in Jed. "There's hot water, and you ought to have some coffee."

Jed even helped vigorously in the rub-down. Tom's teeth were chattering at the outset, but the friction warmed his blood. He put on dry clothing, of which he had enough aboard. And now Jed came out of the galley with a cup of steaming coffee.

"Say, Jed, what made you look so skittish

when you boarded that other boat?" asked the young skipper, smiling. "Were you really afraid?"

"Afraid?" repeated Jed, looking sheepish. "Well, Tom, I'll tell you how it is. When there's no danger near, and I'm thinking over brave deeds, I'm a regular hero, and no mistake. But when I get right down where I think some one may be a going to open on me with both barrels of a shotgun, then I get—well, I won't say afraid, but tormentingly nervous!"

Halstead laughed heartily.

"I guess that's the way with the whole human race, Jed. The man who lugs off the reputation for being brave is the man who won't run, because he is ashamed to let anyone see how mortally afraid he is."

"But what do you make of Ted Dunstan's queer talk?" asked Jed Prentiss. "Do you believe his father really did give him orders to go off with that crowd?"

"I don't want to talk about it," Halstead answered. "Mr. Dunstan is our employer."

"But young Ted always has been a mighty truthful boy," pursued Jed, wonderingly. "Oh, it's all mighty queer, whatever's the truth."

"I guess we'd better let it go at that last statement," proposed Tom; "at least, until we've heard what Mr. Dunstan has to say."

With three or four cups of coffee down, Halstead felt so much warmer that he returned to deck to take the wheel. The "Meteor" was necessarily going much more slowly than usual, with her tow astern. The trip was bound to be such a long one that Jed started things in the galley, then went back through the passageway to the cabin, where he set the folding table with a white cloth. When Lawyer Crane seated himself at supper he was astonished to find how excellent a meal could be prepared in short time aboard this craft.

It was nearing dark when Captain Halstead guided the "Meteor" in toward the Dunstan pier.

While the boat was being made fast by Joe and Jed, Mr. Crane stepped hurriedly ashore.

"Come along, Captain Halstead," said the man of law. "Mr. Dunstan must hear your remarkable story without a moment's delay."

CHAPTER XI

WHERE THE WATER TRAIL ENDED

HORACE Dunstan, pausing in his excited walk in his library, stopped and stared in amazement when Tom came to one point of his strange recital.

"Ted said I gave him instructions to go with that crowd?" he demanded.

"He made that point extremely plain to me, sir," Halstead insisted.

"But I—I never gave him any such instructions," cried Mr. Dunstan, rumpling his hair.

"It seemed unbelievable, sir. And yet your son struck me as a truthful boy."

"He is; he always was," retorted the father. "Ted hated a lie or a liar, and yet this statement is wholly outside of the truth. I assure you——"

"If you'll permit me, sir," broke in the lawyer, who had been listening silently up to this point, "I'll indicate one or two points at which young Halstead's most remarkable——"

"Crane," broke in the master of the house, with unlooked-for sternness, "if you're about to throw any doubt around Tom Halstead's story, I may as well tell you plainly that you're going a little too far. Halstead has been most thoroughly vouched for to me. If you have any notion in your mind that he has been yarning to us, I beg you to let the idea remain in your mind. I don't want to hear it."

"Hm!" said the lawyer, and subsided.

"Captain Halstead," went on Ted's father, "my son's statement is so extraordinary that I don't pretend to fathom it. But I give you

my word, as a man of honor, that I am as much at sea in this matter as anyone could be. But I must get in touch with Wood's Hole at once."

There was a telephone instrument in the room that speedily put the distracted father in communication with one of his detectives over on the mainland. A long talk followed, the upshot of it being that the detective in charge of the search asked that the "Meteor" be sent over to Wood's Hole at once, that she might be ready for any sea-going following-up of clues that might be necessary.

"For, of course, we've got to find that cabin sloop," finished Detective Musgrave. "If the sloop isn't at sea, then the chase undoubtedly must be followed on the mainland. If we have the "Meteor" here we can do quickly anything that may appear necessary."

So Tom received his instant sailing orders. As he hurried from the house, down through the grounds, the young skipper felt relieved at one point. With his belief in Ted's honesty he had been inclined to suspect that Horace Dunstan, for some unknown reasons of his own, such, for instance, as a distaste for having his son go into the Army, might have brought about a pretended disappearance.

"But now I know," muttered Tom, "that Mr. Dunstan is just as honest in his declara-

tions as Ted appeared to be in saying the opposite. If Horace Dunstan has been lying to me just now, I'd have very little further faith in human honesty."

The "Meteor" was speedily on her way. First Joe, and then Tom, was served in the little galley, Jed getting in his mouthfuls as best he could before the motor boat was tied up at Wood's Hole.

Before Tom had time to land a keen-eyed, smooth-faced man of thirty-five, broad-shouldered and a little above medium height, stepped forward out of the darkness and over the rail.

"Do you know me, Captain Halstead?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, I think so," Tom answered. "You're Mr. Musgrave, one of the detectives sent down from New York at Mr. Dunstan's request."

"I am in charge of the case at this point," said Musgrave. "Lead me below."

Tom conducted his caller down into the engine-room, thence through the passageway into the cabin.

"Now, tell me all you can of this affair, and talk as quickly as you can," directed the detective.

Tom told his brief but potent narrative without pausing for breath.

"I have telegraphed or telephoned men from

our agency, so that many points are covered for some distance north along the coast," murmured Mr. Musgrave. "We are also having the islands watched as far around as Block Island. But, since the launch was found running wild and the cabin sloop was not sighted, I am inclined to believe that the trail runs somewhere on the mainland. If you'll take your friend, Joe Dawson, along with you, I'll send also one of the Wood's Hole constables, a man named Jennison. If you run into any of that crew, Jennison has power to make arrests, and he's the sort of man who wouldn't back down before a cannon. I have an automobile ready, and Jennison knows what's expected of him. You're to search up along the coast, to see if you can find any trace of that cabin sloop."

"Do you think Jed Prentiss will be sufficient guard to leave with the boat?" questioned Halstead. "The Alvarez crowd would like nothing better than to disable this fine craft if they got a chance to sneak aboard."

"I'll send down one of the hotel employés to keep Prentiss company, then. Now come along, Halstead. Jennison and the automobile are waiting."

Two minutes later Tom and Joe found themselves speeding along a road that led up along the coast.

"There's no use stopping the first mile or so," explained Constable Jennison, a slight but wiry-looking man of rustic type. "We've been over the near ground already. But we'll go forty miles or more before we give up the search for the home berth of that sloop."

Just below Falmouth the auto-car turned from the road to run down to a cove where several sailing craft and two launches were at anchor. The owner was found. He did not own or know of any such sloop as Halstead described.

On again they went. There was a chauffeur on the front seat. The constable and the boys were in the tonneau. Two more boat-letting resorts were visited, but without success. The constable, however, far from being depressed, became jovial.

"Are you armed, Halstead?" he inquired, a twinkle in his eyes.

"No; I have no use for boys that carry guns," replied Tom.

"You're sensible enough," responded the constable seriously. Then, resuming his bantering tone, he went on:

"But you ought to be ready for anything tonight. Here, put this in your pocket."

"What's this thing supposed to be good for?" Tom demanded dryly, as he took from the officer

a cheap little bronze toy pistol. It was modeled after a business-like revolver, but a glance showed that it was meant only to explode paper caps.

"It belongs to my five-year-old boy," laughed Jennison. "He knows that I often carry a pistol and he doesn't know the difference between a real one and his Fourth of July toy. So to-night, when I was leaving the house, he insisted on my taking his pistol and I had to in order to keep him quiet."

"It looks dangerous enough in the dark," remarked Joe, bending over and taking the "weapon" with a laugh. He looked it over, then returned it to Tom, who, in turn, offered it to the officer.

"Drop it in your pocket," said the latter. "It ought to make you feel braver to feel such a thing next to your body."

With a laugh Tom did as urged. The automobile soon made another stop at a boatyard. Here, again, the search was useless, so they kept on. A fourth was visited with no better result. They were now ten miles from Wood's Hole, but they kept on. A mile further on the car descended a low hill, toward the water, then turned almost at right angles. Just as they rounded this bend in the road Halstead leaned suddenly forward.

"Stop!" he called to the chauffeur.

"What's the matter?" asked Jennison, as the car halted.

"As we came around the bend the searchlight threw a ray between the trees, and I'm sure I saw a cabin sloop down in the offing," Tom explained.

"*I* didn't see it."

"And I got only a brief glimpse," Halstead rejoined. "But don't you think it's worth our while to get out and go down to the water's edge?"

"Of course," nodded the constable. The three piled out of the tonneau, leaving the chauffeur alone. Tom led the way, going straight between the trees down to the water.

"That's the very sloop, I'd almost swear," whispered Tom, pointing to a craft at anchor a hundred yards or so from shore. A small boat lay hauled up on the beach. Not far from where the three stood was a ramshackle little shanty from which no light shone.

"We'll give our attention to the house, first," declared the constable. Accordingly they stepped up to the door, Jennison knocking loudly. From inside came a snore. The summons had to be repeated before a voice inside demanded:

"Who's there? What's wanted?"

"A traveler who wants to speak with you," replied the officer.

There were sounds inside. Then the door opened. They were confronted by a white-haired old man, partly dressed and holding a lighted lantern. He made a venerable picture as he stood there in the doorway.

"Well?" he asked.

"That's your sloop out in the offing?" Jennison asked.

"Yes."

"Did you use her to-day?"

"No; I rented her to a stranger, who wanted to go fishing. I didn't know he had returned. Said he might be out most of the night, and the sloop wasn't back when I turned in at dark."

"Wasn't, eh?" asked the constable, with quick interest. "Now will you tell me what the stranger looked like?"

"Why, he was about forty-five, I guess. Rather heavily built. His skin was well-bronzed——"

"That's the man, French," whispered Tom, nudging the officer. "His face had been stained a good bronze color."

"Did the stranger give any word about coming back at some other time?" asked Jennison.

"No; he paid me for the afternoon and the evening," replied the old man. It was plain

that he had told all he knew about the stranger. The old man stated that he himself was a fisherman, but that in summer he often made more money taking out parties of summer boarders.

Joe, in the meantime, had gone down to the beach to watch the sloop. There appeared to be no one stirring aboard the craft, but, as a precaution, Jennison and the boys rowed out, thus making sure that the sloop was deserted. They hurriedly returned to shore. Jennison now displayed his badge, asking permission to look into the shanty. The old man readily gave the permission, adding, somewhat shakily:

"I'm not used to having my house suspected, but I'm glad to give the law's officer any privileges he may want here."

The search was unavailing. Jennison and his young companions hastened back to the automobile where they stood deliberating.

"That sloop has come in since dark," observed Halstead. "That old man looks as though he could be thoroughly believed. Yet that's the very sloop. I'm positive about that. So the rascals can't have had much the start of us."

"They're a needle in the haystack, now, anyway," sighed Constable Jennison. "We're at the end of the water trail and we know where they landed."

"But we also know that they're on the mainland; at least it looks mighty certain," suggested Tom Halstead.

"That's true," nodded the officer. "Well, Mr. Musgrave must know of this at once. The next village is less than three miles away. I'm going there in the auto as fast as I can and telephone him."

"You'll come back this way?" hinted Tom.

"Yes, without a doubt."

"Then leave us here. We'll hunt for any signs we can find of them while you're gone."

"But how'll I find you on my return?"

"Why, if you stop here, and honk your horn twice, we'll come running to you."

"You might run into the rascals," mused Jennison.

"I hope we do," muttered Tom.

"See here," demanded the officer curiously, "aren't you boys afraid to take a chance like this?" His glance fell on Joe Dawson.

"No," returned Joe very quietly.

"Well, it may not be a bad idea to leave you here until I return," said Jennison briskly. "You may pick up some sign. Anyway, I hope you don't get into any trouble. Good-by for a few minutes."

The car sped out of sight, but neither boy waited to watch it.

"It's a pretty fair guess, Joe," said Tom, "that Alvarez and French came up this way from the shore. Now, that way, the road leads to Wood's Hole. And there's the opposite direction. Alvarez has a little foot like a woman's; French has a very large foot. Now if we can find two such foot marks together, it would look as though we could find the direction our men have taken. Have you any matches?"

"Plenty," Dawson replied.

"So have I. Then suppose you go that way," pointing toward Wood's Hole. "And I'll go the other way. We can light matches every two or three hundred feet and examine the ground. One of us may pick up the trail we want to find."

"Good enough," was all that came from quiet Joe, as he started at once.

For a few minutes the boys could see each other's lights when matches were struck. Then the winding of the road hid them from each other.

Twice the young skipper had found imperfect footprints in the sandy road, but they were not clear enough for him to be sure that these were the tracks he sought. Now Tom stopped again, striking a match and walking slowly along as he shielded the flame from the light breeze with his hands. Then suddenly he came to a brief

halt, as his gaze traveled across the road. He saw an object on the ground in front of a bush, an object that caused him to bound across the road.

"Great! Fine!" breathed the boy jubilantly. "I'd know this little article anywhere. It's the tobacco pouch of——"

"Ah, good evening, my friend," broke in a taunting voice. "It's the meddling boy himself!"

Halstead, even before he could straighten up, found himself staring between the branches of the bush into a pair of gleaming, mocking eyes.

"Señor Alvarez!" cried the young skipper.

Then something struck Tom heavily from behind, felling him to the ground, unconscious.

CHAPTER XII

JOE HAS HIS COURAGE TESTED

WHEN young Halstead next knew anything his mind was hazy at first. He realized dimly, and then more clearly, that he was upon some one's shoulder, being carried. There was a buzzing, too, over his right ear, where his head throbbed dully and ached.

As he opened his eyes wider he saw that he

was being carried along under trees and over rising ground.

Then his thoughts became clearer and he felt certain it was none other than Captain Jonas French who was carrying him. Some one else, probably Alvarez, was treading the ground behind him.

Halstead gave a sigh, then murmured:

"Put me down!"

They were luckless words, for French vented but the one syllable, "Right," then dropped him to the ground and sat on him.

"Don't make the mistake of trying to make any noise, either," growled the once florid-faced one. "No one could hear you here except us, but we'll take noise as an evidence of unkind disposition on your part."

"Tie him," murmured Don Emilio, standing over the boy.

Without making any response in words, French rolled the boy over on his face. Tom didn't attempt to resist. He was too weak; his strength was just beginning to come back. French knotted a rope around his wrists, held behind him, then quickly lashed the young skipper's ankles together.

"And this!" insisted Alvarez. A gag composed or two handkerchiefs was forced between Halstead's lips and made fast there.

"Now, my meddling boy, you may be as unpleasant as you please," mocked Don Emilio Alvarez, bending over and smiling into Halstead's face. "Ah, you have been troublesome to us—very. And you have inquired what I would do to you if I had you down in Honduras, where they do things differently. Ah, well! Perhaps, my meddling boy, you shall discover what I would do to you! Will you, my large friend, lift him and carry him on again? We are not far from the place where we can keep him securely enough."

With a grunt French once more shouldered his burden, tramping on through the forest, Alvarez still bringing up the rear. Then, from the crest of a rise they pressed between a fringe of bushes and next began to descend a narrow, rocky path. They stopped in a ravine, densely grown with trees.

"Even in the daytime this place is hardly likely to be found by prying eyes," laughed Alvarez confidently. "And now, my captain, you might rid yourself of the meddling boy."

French dropped Tom at the base of a young spruce tree, knotting another cord to his feet and passing it around the trunk of the tree.

"He won't get away—can't, even though we were to leave him here through the night," muttered French gruffly.

"And I, since my meddling boy found for me the tobacco pouch that I dropped in his path for bait, will enjoy a smoke once more," laughed Señor Alvarez. He rolled a cigarette, which he soon was puffing. French, having filled a pipe, lighted that and stretched himself at full length. Thus several minutes went by. Tom Halstead, unable to talk, spent his energies in wondering whether Ted Dunstan was anywhere in the near neighborhood.

After many minutes had passed the deep silence of this wild spot was broken by an owl hoot. Alvarez, raising his head, answered by a similar hoot. Then from the distance came two hoots.

"Come, we will go forward to meet our friends," proposed the swarthy little man eagerly, as he sprang to his feet. French got up more lumberingly, though almost as quickly. Together they trod up to the head of the ravine. Out of the darkness ahead came Pedro and a little brown man who looked as much like a Spaniard as Alvarez did.

"We'se done brought yo' dis," stated Pedro with a grin that showed his big, white teeth.

"This" was Joe Dawson, his hands tied behind him, his face as sullen as a storm cloud in a summer shower. Joe was walking, led by Pedro, and pushed at times by the brown man.

"Ho, ho!" laughed Alvarez, in keen relish. "You have not done badly. You bring me the other meddling boy. Halt him here—so. Tie him against this tree that he may have a chance to lean." Alvarez watched until Joe had been moored fast, then asked:

"How many did you come out with to-night?"

"Guess!" proposed Joe pleasantly.

"Don't dare to be impertinent, boy!" warned Don Emilio, his eyes flashing. "Answer me straight, and—what do you call it?—to the point, as you Americans say."

"Lemon?" laughed Joe Dawson coolly. "No, thank you. I always take vanilla."

"Boy, if you get me any more angry," stormed Don Emilio, "you will regret it."

But Dawson merely looked at the swarthy, false-bearded little man with an air of boredom.

"Let me handle him," proposed Jonas French, stepping forward.

"I'll be glad if you will wait on me," drawled Joe, looking at the larger man. "I don't believe this little fellow knows his business or his goods."

With an angered cry Don Emilio darted in, striking his cool tormentor across the face.

"Hold on," objected Joe lazily, "I didn't ask to be called until nine o'clock."

"Are you going to stop this nonsense?" de-

manded Don Emilio, his voice quavering with wrath.

"Dawson," remarked French, "you don't appear to realize your fix."

Joe stared at him haughtily, remarking:

"My bill is not due until the end of the week. Go away and let me read in peace."

Pedro, in the background, was holding one hand over his broad mouth to hide his expansive grin over this cool nonsense. But Don Emilio was fast losing his not very certain temper.

"Go and bring that other boy Halstead," ordered Alvarez. "When the two of them see each other they'll know their game is up, and they'll come to their senses. If not, nothing will make any difference to them after a few minutes more."

Without a word French turned, treading down the ravine. Just a little later he reappeared, looking bewildered.

"Alvarez," he gasped, "come here. That other boy isn't where we left him. Hurry!"

Uttering an exclamation of amazement, Alvarez darted after his friend. Pedro and the little brown man, caught in the astonishment, bolted after their leaders.

Joe could not get away from the tree to which he was bound, but he stood there grinning with

cool enjoyment. In another moment he felt a lively sound at his back. Then Halstead whispered in his ear:

"I'm cutting you loose, old fellow! Bolt with me!"

Dawson, straining at the cords while Tom slashed at them, was quickly free.

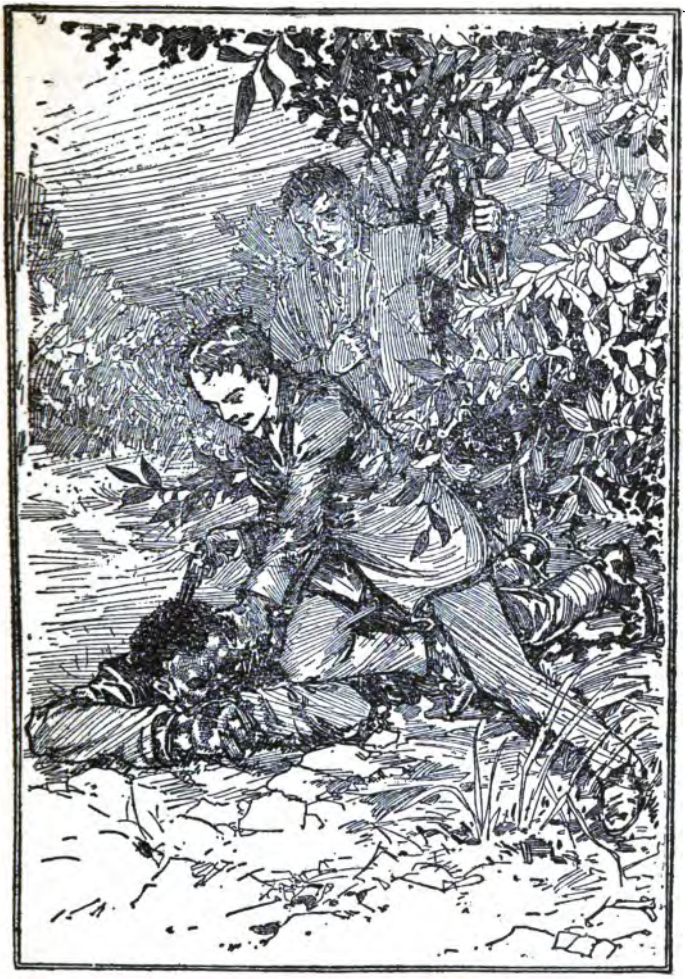
"Come along," begged Tom. "Never mind stopping to leave cards or writing a note of regret. Hustle—this way!"

Halstead led in the swift flight in the direction that he judged the roads to lie. They tried to go noiselessly, but they had not gone far when a shout behind showed them that their flight had been detected.

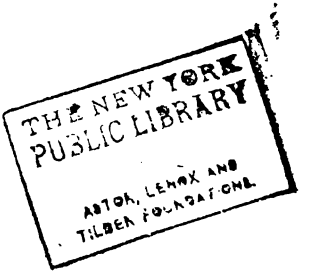
"Sprint, old chum!" floated back over Halstead's shoulder.

In looking back, the young skipper stumbled. Joe had to pause long enough to drag his comrade to his feet. That lost them a few precious seconds, but they dashed onward once more. As they ran they heard the feet of the pursuers behind. From greater familiarity with the ground some of those in chase were gaining on the fugitives.

Joe now led in the chase, with Tom at his heels. They came to what appeared to be the wooded slope leading down to the road. Joe ran up against a wall almost sooner than he had



Tom Remembered the Toy Pistol, Just in Time.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expected. He nearly fell over it, but recovered and jumped. Halstead landed in the road beside him.

There was another flying figure in the air, and Pedro was beside them, reaching out. Behind were French and Don Emilio.

"Yo better stop, fo' shuah!" called Pedro, parting his lips in a grin of huge enjoyment. "Dere ain't no use in tryin' to git away from me."

CHAPTER XIII

A CAPTURE IN RECORD TIME

"LOOK out! He's mine!" shouted Joe. But Tom Halstead had sprung in the same instant at Pedro. The result was that the combined assault of the boys bore the fellow to the ground, and Tom, remembering, just in the nick of time, the toy cap pistol that Jennison had handed him, and which had escaped discovery a few minutes before, hauled that ridiculous "weapon" out, pressing it against the temple of the black man.

"Don't you stir, if you know what's best for you," warned the young skipper sternly.

Joe, seeing the lay of the land, leaped up to meet Captain French, who was just reaching that wall.

At that moment the noise of a speeding auto was borne to them, while around the bend whizzed the machine, sending its strong searchlight ray ahead to illumine the scene.

The yells of its occupants caused the other pursuers of the boys to halt in confusion. Before they had time to think what to do the automobile was racing up to the spot and stopping. Alvarez and his two companions bore away up the wooded slope as fast as their alarm could spur them.

"What's this going on here?" demanded Constable Jennison, as he leaped out into the road.

"You'll find some of the rascals up there among the trees," replied Tom, coolly. "I have one of 'em here, but he's tame now."

Pedro, in fact, in his dread lest he be shot, was lying on his stomach, his face between his crossed arms, while Halstead stood over him, holding that wholly useless "pistol."

"Just move that car a few yards ahead, will you?" begged Tom of the chauffeur, fearing that in the strong light, Pedro might steal a look sideways and find out what a comical "weapon" had scared him.

"There are three of the crowd up there," added Joe. "They were chasing us, but your arrival scared them off."

"I'll make sure of the one we have, first," re-

turned the constable, going toward the prostrate negro. "My man, put your hands behind you, and be quick about it."

Pedro obeyed without a murmur, the constable snapping handcuffs on him without loss of an instant. "Now, help me lift him into the auto—front seat," directed the officer. But Pedro, seemingly afraid of the consequences of any stubbornness, aided his captors.

"Can you keep him, Jack?" asked the constable of the man at the steering wheel.

"I can bring him down, if he tries to bolt," came the quick retort from the chauffeur.

" 'Fore hebben, Ah won't try nothing funny," protested Pedro, solemnly. He was seemingly still afraid that the slightest defiance would cost him his life.

"See that this fellow is locked up, Jack," commanded Jennison, in a low voice. "Speed some, too, and get back here as fast as you can with some more men. It may be that there's going to be a fight."

Just as the car started two sharp reports rang out from the hillside above. There were two flashes, and bullets whizzed ominously over the road. One of them pierced Tom's uniform cap, carrying it from his head.

There being nothing he could do, Dawson threw himself to the ground, out of harm's way.

Tom, crouching low, darted across the road after his hat. But Jennison leaped forward, weapon in hand, letting three shots fly back to answer the defiance from under the trees.

"Come on! We'll close in on 'em and mow 'em down if they don't surrender!" shouted the officer.

His call to the boys was intended for the hearing of those above. He had no notion that the boys, unarmed, would accompany him. Yet, as Jennison bounded over the wall, the two young motor boat boys were behind him on either side.

"Now, then, you fellows up there, throw down your shooting irons and prepare to give yourselves up," called the doughty constable. "If you don't——"

Four shots answered this demand, the bullets clipping off leaves so close to the trio that the boys crouched lower almost instinctively.

"All right, then, I'm coming up to get you!" shouted the constable running forward, weapon in hand. But he halted at length, well away from the road, uncertain which way to turn.

"What are you boys doing here, unarmed?" he whispered, facing them in surprise.

"We're as safe here as we'd be anywhere else hereabouts," Tom whispered back.

"Yes, I don't know but that's so. But

where can the scoundrels be? Do you know anything about the lay of the land here?"

"I think we can find the ravine where they took us," suggested Joe.

"Try to, then."

Both boys now went a bit in advance of the officer, but he kept close to them, in order to be on hand if they ran into any danger.

The ravine proved to be empty, however. Tom pointed out where he had slashed Joe's bonds away. "And over yonder," he added, "I guess I can show you the rope I worked my own wrists out of. Once I worked my hands free it didn't take me long to cut away the rest of the tackle."

Though they searched for upwards of an hour, they were unable to find any further trace of the scoundrels. Nor did they come upon any place that looked as though it had been used as a hiding place for the missing Dunstan heir.

Then a loud honking from the road recalled them. The chauffeur was there with the machine, from which were alighting four deputies whom he had brought out with him from Wood's Hole.

"I'm going to leave you men here to carry on the search," explained Mr. Jennison. "Keep it up all through the night, and through the daylight, too, if you run across anything that

looks like a trail. These young men will describe to you the fellows you're expected to find. I'll be back bye and bye, but don't wait for me."

Tom and Joe quickly described the three fugitives from justice. Then Jennison turned to the chauffeur to inquire:

"Could you work any information out of that black man?"

"Not a word," came the grumbling reply. "After a few minutes he got over being so scared, but he couldn't be made to say a word about his crowd. Just closed his mouth, and wouldn't talk. Musgrave has him in hand now, at the station house, but not a word can the fellow be made to say."

"I'm going back with you, now," proposed Jennison, "to see what I can get out of him. You boys may as well come with me. It looks like a losing chase here. If we can get something out of the chap, Pedro, we'll have something real to come back with."

So Tom and Joe piled in with their new friend. In less than half an hour they had entered the little guard-room of the police station at Wood's Hole. Pedro, still manacled, was seated in a hard wooden armchair between two constables, while Detective Musgrave paced the floor before him.

"He's trying a crafty game," smiled Musgrave, as the newcomers entered. "Once in a while the prisoner talks, but when he does it's to shake his head and mutter a string in Spanish."

"He understands English well enough," answered Tom. "He has talked a whole lot of it to me."

"Of course he understands English," laughed Mr. Musgrave. "I know his type of colored man well. He's a Jamaica negro, born and brought up with English spoken around him. Afterwards he went over to Central America and picked up Spanish."

"*No sabe,*" broke in the negro, looking blankly at those who surrounded him.

"Oh, you savvy plenty well enough," Tom retorted tartly. "And see here, Pedro, you're a pretty cheap sort of rascal anyway. You remember how Joe and I caught you, and how I scared you cold? Do you know what it was that scared your grit away from you? Just a plain, ordinary, every-day joke of a cap pistol!"

Pedro started, his lips opening in a gasp at that information.

"Oh, of course you understand, just as well as anyone else in the room," Halstead went on. "And here's the young cannon that made you lie so still in the road."

With a short laugh Tom produced the cap

pistol, holding it before the astonished black man's face. Pedro's disgusted expression was enough to make them all laugh.

"He can't even pretend he doesn't understand English now," snorted Mr. Musgrave. "Come now, my man, open your mouth and talk to us. It may help *you* out a bit when you come to be tried."

Still, however, the black man refused to say a word. Constable Jennison tried his hand at making the fellow speak, but without success. At last they gave it up. The negro was taken to a cell, left under watch, and the others went outside.

"I'm going back up the road," Jennison announced. "Want to come with me, boys?"

"I think they'd better stay by the boat, in case anything turns up that we want the craft," Musgrave broke in.

So Tom and Joe struck out for the pier, finding Jed mighty glad to have them back once more. For an hour the three boys sat on the "Meteor's" deckhouse and talked. After that the time began to hang heavily on their hands.

Broad daylight came with still no word from the seekers, nor from any other point. At a little after four o'clock Mr. Musgrave came down to tell them that they might as well return to Nantucket.

It was six o'clock when the "Meteor" berthed at the island. Jed had served a breakfast on the trip over. As soon as the boat was docked Jed hurried into the broad bunk off the cabin passageway, while Tom and Joe, yawning with weariness, lay down on the engine-room lockers.

"This is Sunday morning and to-morrow morning Ted Dunstan must be in court with his father or lose a tremendously big fortune," groaned Tom. "Oh, when we've been so near to rescuing him, why can't we have him safely home under his father's roof?"

"Maybe I'll have the answer thought out by the time I wake up," gaped Joe Dawson. "But just at this present moment I'm so tired I don't know whether I'm an imitation engineer or a clambake."

Then another sound came from his berth. Dawson was snoring.

CHAPTER XIV

HEADED FOR THE SUNKEN REEF

SZZ-ZZ! Sputter! And the fragrance of it, too!

"Say, you fellows, aren't you ever going to wake up?"

Jed Prentiss had his hand on Joe, shaking him.

"Have you any idea what time it is?" insisted Jed, as Dawson opened his eyes halfway.

"Time to go to bed again," muttered Joe, trying to shake off that insistent hand and rolling over the other way.

"It's after noon," pronounced Prentiss. "Say, you fellows could sleep a week through!" And Jed gave Joe a hearty shake. "I told you breakfast is ready."

"No, you didn't," insisted Joe.

"I've told you so three times in the last five minutes," asserted Jed, "but you wouldn't wake up long enough to understand. Can't you get it through your head? *Breakfast!*"

"Whatcher got?" asked Joe drowsily.

"Coffee!"

"Had that yesterday," protested Joe, settling himself as though for another doze.

"And bacon and eggs!"

"Had that three days ago," complained Joe.

"And fried potatoes," went on Jed.

"They'll keep."

"Muffins!" proclaimed Jed solemnly.

At that Dawson opened his eyes wide.

"Are they sticky inside or your best kind, browned all over the top?" Joe asked with a show of interest.

"Browned?" echoed Jed. "Say, they're

beauties—the best I ever baked. And I've opened a tin of preserved pineapple to top off with."

"I guess maybe I'll get up," admitted Joe.

"You'd better, if you don't want to find everything cold and tasteless," insisted Jed, who thereupon went over to shake Halstead.

But Tom slipped up instantly, reaching for his swimming tights. Soon a splash was heard over the side. Joe followed him. Both felt more awake when they came back to towel down. As they dressed the savory smells of Jed's best breakfast made them hurry.

"I'd sooner have you wake me up, Jed, than some folks I know," announced Joe Dawson, as he passed his plate for the second helping of bacon, eggs and fried potatoes.

"It *does* taste good," Halstead admitted with a relish, chewing hard. "But has there been any news from the house this morning?"

"Haven't seen a soul, except you sleepers," Jed answered.

"How did you wake up, anyway?" demanded Joe suspiciously. "Alarm clock at your head?"

"Yes," assented Prentiss. "But it really woke me up. That's more than it could do for you fellows."

By the time they had that famous breakfast down all felt better. Tom and Joe adjourned

to the deck, where Jed joined them as soon as he had washed the dishes and cleaned up.

"Here comes Mr. Dunstan now," announced Joe presently.

All turned to look at the boat's owner. Mr. Dunstan appeared to have aged greatly after his night's vigil. His face was furrowed by care; he walked with a greater stoop then before.

"Poor fellow," sighed Halstead. "And there are only twenty-four hours left for finding the Dunstan heir."

"No news, I take it, sir?" hailed Tom, as the owner stepped upon the pier and came toward the boat.

"None, since the word Mr. Musgrave sent me last night of your exploits," murmured Horace Dunstan, shaking his head sadly. "And to think that my boy has spent days aboard that ugly craft," he added, gazing wistfully at the yellow-hulled launch at anchor a few rods away. Then he turned once more to the young skipper.

"How are you and your friends, Halstead? Very tired?"

"I don't believe we're so weary that you'd notice it unless you looked very hard," smiled Halstead.

"If you're not too much used up by last

night's work I have a favor to ask of you. But it's not an order, understand?"

"Why, what can it be, Mr. Dunstan?"

"Well, you see," continued the owner apologetically, "before this trouble happened we had invited Mrs. Lester and her two young daughters to spend a fortnight with us. They had not heard of our misfortune, and so they came over on this morning's boat. They heard in Nantucket and telephoned us, proposing to turn about and go home again. But of course we insisted that they should come to us. They are going to church, this evening, but Mrs. Dunstan is so much upset over the mystery surrounding our son that—that—well, we thought of proposing that they use the 'Meteor' for a little sail this afternoon. That is, in case you young men are not too tired to——"

"Why, of course we can take the boat out," replied Halstead, breaking in upon the considerate owner. "It won't tire us any more than lolling around the pier."

"Mrs. Dunstan and I will both be greatly pleased if you will do it," declared Horace Dunstan gratefully.

"But do you think any developments from shore will make it necessary to get the 'Meteor' on the jump over to Wood's Hole?" broke in Joe.

"You might keep the boat within sight of our flagpole," replied Mr. Dunstan. "That will allow you to sail some miles away if you use the glass every few minutes. In case we want you to return here in haste we'll hoist one red pennant. If we want you to make full speed for Wood's Hole, without first returning here, we'll hoist two red pennants. In the latter case you can land Mrs. Lester and her daughters and they can go to the hotel at Wood's Hole until your work with the boat is done. Then you can bring them back."

"That'll all be clear and easy," nodded Tom. "Well, sir, we're ready when you are."

"I'll be right back with the ladies," promised Mr. Dunstan. Joe began to oil the engine, while Jed made a dive for his cleanest white duck suit. Tom carefully brushed his uniform; he had secured another coat, at the owner's expense, since leaving that other behind in the tight grip of Jonas French. It was a trim, natty-looking boat's crew that met the ladies when Mr. Dunstan brought them aboard. Mrs. Lester was a woman of forty, still young looking and handsome. The girls—Elsie, aged seventeen, and Jessie, fifteen, looked extremely sweet and dainty in their white dresses, blue reefers and yachting caps.

Mr. Dunstan left them almost immediately.

"Shall I take you aft to the deck chairs?" inquired Tom.

Mrs. Lester assented, but the girls declared that, if they might, they much preferred to remain on the bridge deck and watch the running of the boat. To this Tom gladly assented.

The "Meteor" slipped gracefully away from her pier, then turned and headed over in the direction of Muskeget Island. This was a course that would keep them easily in sight of the Dunstan flagpole.

"You must look upon us as splendid nuisances?" suggested Elsie.

"Yes, to that, if you'll leave out the word 'nuisances,'" smiled Captain Tom gallantly.

"But to be asked to take the boat out, after all your hard and daring work last night," added Jessie.

"Hard work comes naturally in a life on the sea," Tom replied. "And we had our sleep, after the night's work."

"But what fearful danger you went through. Mr. Dunstan was telling us all about it, as he heard it from his man over at Wood's Hole," said Elsie. "What fearful danger you were in!"

"We didn't think much about it at the time," remarked Halstead modestly. "When one has had to stand at the wheel of a motor boat, on

the broad ocean, in all sorts of weather, and when he has to win out and bring his craft and passengers back safely, he doesn't meet much that he calls dangerous."

It was so quietly spoken that both girls glanced quickly, admiringly at the young captain. Joe, standing at the hatchway, looked as though he were thinking of nothing but the revolutions per minute that the propeller shaft was making.

"It must just be a splendid life!" declared Jessie impulsively. "I wish I were a boy."

"Some day," laughed Tom, "you may be pleased that you're not."

"Yet it must be fine," pursued Elsie, "to look over this handsome boat and feel that you're man enough to be absolute master of her and to feel that you can handle and control her under any conditions."

"I couldn't," Halstead declared seriously. "I can steer the boat as long as the steering gear isn't damaged or broken, that is, if the boat is under headway. But let there be an accident to the steering mechanism or let the motor refuse to drive the propeller, and suppose the accident to be of such a nature that we three boys couldn't make the necessary repairs, how much control do you think I'd have over this craft? How much of a master do you think I'd

be? Miss Lester, certain men have used their brains to design boat hulls. Other men have invented and perfected the propeller mechanism. Then finally other men, out of their brains, constructed the gasoline motor. We boys didn't have anything to do with any of those triumphs of skill. All we've had to do is to learn how to be handy with the handling of other people's discoveries."

"That doesn't sound very impressive, does it?" laughed Jessie.

"It isn't," declared Joe, taking part in the talk for the first time. "Down at the mouth of the Kennebec River there's a whole club of boys who have learned to do just what we do."

"You may try to make out that you're not brave and manly," laughed Elsie, "but I shall keep on believing that you are."

"That's why I wish, sometimes, I could be a boy and grow up to be a man," added Jessie.

"I guess a woman can find enough chance to show bravery," Tom answered thoughtfully.

"Oh, how the boat is rolling," cried Elsie, lurching as the "Meteor" rolled over to port.

Jed, who had just lowered the glass after a look at the Dunstan flagstaff, caught her lightly by one elbow, steadying her.

"If you brace your feet, just this way," explained Jed, illustrating the idea with his own

feet, "the roll won't carry you off your balance."

Both girls practiced it, laughing gayly over having learned a new trick on shipboard.

"Mr. Dunstan said something about your going only a certain distance away from his place," observed Miss Elsie presently.

"We must keep within sight of the flagstaff; that is, we mustn't go so far that we'd fail to see a signal through the glass," Tom explained.

"How much further can you go, then?" inquired Miss Jessie.

"Do you see that point over on Muskeget Island?"—pointing.

"Yes."

"We can go a couple of miles beyond there and still be able to make out signals."

"My, it's getting windier and rougher, isn't it?" asked Elsie presently.

"I think there's a good blow coming up before long," Halstead answered. "If you wish, we can turn about and head back toward the pier."

"Not unless you really want to," protested the girl. "I'm enjoying this trip too much."

"Then we'll pass Muskeget and cruise up and down, instead of going further away from Nantucket," Tom proposed. "The wind is shifting around to northeast, which promises a

goodish kind of blow at this time of the year. If we should get very rough weather I'd like to be where I can run in with you quickly, instead of taking chances out here."

"Can the 'Meteor' go faster than she's going now?"

"Well, she's making about fourteen miles," smiled the young captain. "Her best speed is about twice that."

They ran out past Muskeget Island, then turned back on their course, going nearer to Nantucket. They were now about north of Muskeget, but gradually passing the island, when Tom began to notice that something was wrong with the speed of the boat.

"What's up with the engine, Joe?" Halstead called down to his now invisible chum.

"That's what I'm trying to find out," Joe retorted. "I don't like the motor's behavior, and it's getting worse every minute."

"I should say so," muttered Tom.

"There isn't any danger of a serious accident, is there?" asked Miss Elsie quickly.

"Probably not," was the young skipper's reply. "But we don't know, and can't, until we find out what's wrong."

"Oh, we ought to hurry back," shivered Miss Elsie. "We ought to get in before there's any accident."

"Why, provided none of us were drowned, an accident would be something worth remembering," laughed Jessie mischievously.

"Jessie Lester, how dare you say so?" demanded her sister, looking somewhat shocked.

"Say," bawled up the now excited voice of Joe Dawson, "this is a tough one!"

He showed his worried face at the hatchway, adding:

"The tank's empty! The last drops of gasoline are running into the motor!"

"What's that?" demanded Tom aghast. "How could that have happened?"

"I don't know," was Joe's bewildered response. "The tank was half-full when we got back from Wood's Hole early this morning. But now it's empty. Look for yourself."

The propeller shaft made a few faint turns, then stopped. Having little headway by this time the "Meteor" soon began to drift aimlessly over the rolling waters.

"I don't need to look," Tom answered, dropping his hand from the wheel. "I can see enough to believe you, Joe. But how on earth could this have happened, Joe?"

"It didn't happen without some one tampering with the tank," Joe exploded resentfully. "There's no leak in the tank. We should, by

rights, have oil enough to run to New York and back."

There being nothing now that he could do in the engine room, Dawson stepped moodily up on deck. The girls watched Captain Tom's face. Mrs. Lester, her curiosity aroused by the stopping of speed, attempted to come forward along the deck. The rolling of the craft made this so dangerous for her that Jed sprang forward, piloting her safely forward. There the situation was soon made plain to the frightened mother.

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

"I don't know," Tom asked, the glass to his eyes, as he looked over the rolling waters. "Had our gasoline held out we could have made the pier with time to spare."

"Is there real danger, then?" demanded Mrs. Lester, her face betraying her great alarm.

"There's a northeast blow, and a big one, going to strike us within half an hour," the young skipper replied. "And there's not a craft in sight I can signal to. Our anchors wouldn't hold in the blow that's coming."

"Can't you signal the Dunstan place?" asked the much-alarmed lady.

"Yes, but I doubt if they could see our signals, our mast is so low and the distance so great."

"But they have that steam launch there. If you could make them understand, captain, they could send the launch out to us."

"The launch is too small a craft to face the blow that's coming," Tom rejoined gravely. "Besides, Mr. Dunstan has no one who knows anything about handling a marine steam engine. If you ladies will go into the cabin——"

"And feel like rats in a trap while there's danger!" remonstrated Mrs. Lester. "Oh, please don't ask us to leave the deck. We'll feel safer here. At least we shall be able to see what's happening."

"Get the lifelines, Joe, and rig them quickly," spoke Tom gravely. "Jed, help me to get the anchors overboard. We'll do everything we can."

While the boys worked like beavers the wind came down upon them with ever-increasing force. At first the anchors held, the "Meteor" straining at her cables.

"Here comes a squall!" shouted Tom, suddenly. "Catch hold! Hold fast! We'll soon know about our anchors."

As the squall struck, the "Meteor" heeled over. The ladies screamed with fright. Even the motor boat boys felt the thrill of dread. The boat rolled as though she were going to turn turtle. Then, slowly, she righted herself.

"One of the cables has parted!" shouted Jed, through the increasing tempest.

Another and heavier squall struck them, again heeling the motor boat over. She righted herself, but the gale was becoming stronger, and, despite the remaining anchor, the "Meteor" now began to drift toward the lee shore of Muskeget.

Miss Elsie, deathly white, and clutching desperately at the lifelines, began to sob.

"It's fearful, I know," spoke Captain Tom, quietly. "But we've got to face it and hope for the best. You were admiring courage a while ago, but now you can show as much as any man could."

"You're right," Miss Elsie called back through the roar of the gale, as she steadied herself. "Thank you; by pointing out the need of courage you've given me much."

Tom turned to stare, with grave, impassive face, to leeward. An eighth of a mile off the beach at Muskeget lay a reef ordinarily sunken below the surface in calm weather. But now the waves were dashing over this ledge, showing the jagged points of the rough stone.

"If a miracle doesn't happen," thought the young skipper, noting the course of the boat's drift, "we'll wreck there soon, and then there's a doubt if one of us gets out of it alive!"

CHAPTER XV

IN THE TEETH OF DEATH

"WHAT'S the worst, now, captain?" It was Miss Jessie who asked this, her lips close to the young skipper's ear, for the gale's roar now drowned out all ordinary tones.

"Do you see that line of spray?" asked Halstead, pointing to where the water dashed over the reef.

"Yes."

"I'm wondering if it's possible for us not to be dashed on that."

"Wrecked?" demanded Jessie, her face paling, but her lips steady.

"That's one of our dangers."

"And that will mean that we must be drowned?"

"We'll hope not," replied Halstead, forcing a smile. "Joe! Jed!"

Getting his friends where Mrs. Lester could not overhear, Halstead went on quickly:

"If we go to smash on the reef, remember that I'm to take the mother into the water. Joe, you take the elder daughter; Jed, you the younger one. If we have to get into the water

with women's lives to save, remember the glory of American seamen!"

"I'll get ashore double, or not at all," Joe promised, and he knew very well how little likelihood there was of reaching safety on land.

"I'll prove I'm one of you," promised Jed, though his face was ashen. Tom grabbed his hand long enough to give it a mighty squeeze. Then the young skipper moved to the starboard rail where he could watch best. His calculations had proved correct. The "Meteor," drifting helplessly, was bound to strike on the reef. With fascinated gaze Tom watched the angry breakers.

"We're pretty near the finish, aren't we?" asked Miss Jessie in his ear. The girl's voice was icily calm.

"I think we're going to strike within two or three minutes," Tom responded, stonily. "If we do, trust to us in the water, and try not to hamper us. I'll try to get your mother ashore, Jed takes you, and Joe your sis——"

Tom stopped short. Where on earth was Joe? That youth had vanished from the deck.

"Why, I thought Joe was here, right ready for his next duty," cried Halstead, amazedly. "Where——"

"He went below," bawled back Jed. "But he's not in the engine room."

"Then he's doing something that's good, anyway," spoke Tom, with whole faith in his tried comrade.

Once more the young captain turned to watch the line of breakers. The "Meteor" was deadly close now, her staunch hull in imminent danger.

"Here—quick!" roared Dawson's heaviest tones.

His head showed in the hatchway. He was handing through a metal can.

"And I've got another one," he shouted. "Thought there must be some reserve aboard, so I explored the spare lockers aft. There—got it?"

For Tom had snatched up a five-gallon can and was lifting it to the covered deck forward. The "Meteor" was rolling and pitching under the lashing of the gale. Waves broke and dashed over that forward deck, but Joe, with a second five-gallon can, followed. Both boys had to crawl, feeling as though they were holding on by their teeth.

"You pour—I'll shield the inlet from water!" shouted Dawson, over all the roar of the elements. "It's life or death in a minute, now, old chum!"

Well enough Tom knew that, but he saw also the one bare chance of getting all hands out of their awful plight. Dawson crawled around to

windward of the inlet to the gasoline tank, shielding it as much as he could with his body. He unscrewed the cap, while Tom removed the smaller top of one of the gasoline cans.

"Wait until the dash of the next wave is past," shouted Halstead. "Then I'll pour."

Though it took many precious moments, they contrived to empty the can into the tank without getting any salt water mixed with it.

"Now, another can!" breathed Joe tensely.

But Tom, raising his eyes to glance at the spray-ridden reef, answered quickly:

"Later. There isn't a second to lose now. Hustle back!"

The dragging anchor retarded the bow of the boat somewhat. It was the stern that seemed about to strike the reef. While Joe worked liked lightning in the engine room Tom stood with both hands resting on the wheel. He dreaded, every instant, to feel the bump and the jar that should tell the news that the "Meteor" had struck.

"What do you want? Speed ahead?" bawled up Joe.

"As quickly as you can possibly give it," Tom answered.

Still Halstead stared astern. It seemed as though the reef were rising to meet the hull of the boat.

Throb! Chug! The motor was working, slowly. With an inward gasp of thanksgiving Halstead swung the bow around a bit to port. The engine, weaker than the gale, must drag the anchor at least a short distance. Any attempt to raise it too soon might hold the boat to the danger line.

But Tom felt a sudden glow of happiness. The "Meteor" was forging slowly ahead. She would soon be safe, if the engine remained staunch. There was fearfully little oil in the tank, and he knew that the delivery of gas to the ignition apparatus must be very slight.

Out of the engine room came Joe in a hurry, signaling to Jed to follow him. The two crawled out, over that wet, slippery forward deck of the rolling, pitching boat, and managed to empty a second can into the tank. The engine was working better by the time that the pair regained the bridge deck.

"That's enough to get us out of all trouble," shouted Joe briefly. "We needn't bother about the third one aft until we're well out of this."

Captain Tom, watching the reef that they were slowly leaving behind, soon decided that it was time to haul in the anchor that had held. Joe and Jed accomplished this. The instant that the drag was clear of the bottom the "Meteor" shot ahead.

"Hurrah!" yelled all three of the young seamen, when that new start came.

"We're safe, now, aren't we?" inquired Mrs. Lester, bending forward, her eyes shining.

"Unless there's some new trouble with the motor," Tom answered her, "we ought to be back at the Dunstan place in twenty minutes."

Now, Jed brought the third can of gasoline from the locker aft. He and Joe succeeded in emptying it. If all went well, there was now enough oil in the tank to carry the boat much further than she had to go. Even at that, however, the boat was running with less gasoline than she had ever carried in her tank before.

"There are Mr. Dunstan and his wife down at the pier, watching us," announced Miss Jessie, as they came within eye-range of the Dunstan place. "They must have been dreadfully worried about us."

"Now, I know what danger is, and just what courage and steadfastness men may show," remarked Miss Elsie, as they passed south of a little headland that formed one of the shelters of the Dunstan cove.

"And you know how much grit women may show," rejoined Halstead, "for not once did you give us any trouble."

"Perhaps we were too badly frightened to make trouble," laughed Jessie Lester.

"Well, you didn't any of you faint or have hysterics after you realized the danger was over, did you?" retorted Captain Tom, laughing. "You can't get away from the charge that you all showed splendid courage as soon as you realized that we were in real danger."

"But you were planning to swim ashore with us from the reef," said Mrs. Lester.

"I'm very, very thankful we didn't have to try it," replied Halstead, soberly. "It would have been one of those one-in-a-hundred chances that I don't like to have to take."

Jed was busy, now, putting out the heaviest fenders along the port side of the hull. Even in the cove the waves were running at a troublesome height. Yet Tom and Joe, by good team work at their respective posts, ran the "Meteor" in alongside the pier, almost without a jar.

"I'm thankful you're all back safe," called Mr. Dunstan, coming toward them. "I would have been worried, Mrs. Lester, if I hadn't known all about the captain and crew that had the boat out."

But when he heard about the hairbreadth escape from going on the reef off Muskeget Mr. Dunstan's face went deathly pale. He asked the ladies to return to the house, while he boarded the "Meteor" and faced the boys anxiously.

"What on earth can it mean that the gasoline ran out?" he demanded. "Dawson, are you absolutely sure that you had plenty of oil when you returned at daylight this morning?"

"Positive of it, sir," came emphatically from Engineer Joe.

"Then that oil must have been pumped quietly out of the tank while you three slept almost the sleep of the dead," exclaimed the owner.

"It was pumped out very early in the day, too," Tom insisted. "Such a big quantity couldn't have been pumped anywhere except overboard. It would have taken several barrels to hold what was in the tank. Yet, by the time we were on deck, at a little after noon, there wasn't a sign of gasoline anywhere on the water about us. The tide had carried it away."

"I suppose anyone could have operated a steam-engine over your heads and you boys wouldn't have heard it this morning, you were so sound asleep," mused Mr. Dunstan. "Yet it was in broad daylight that you berthed the boat. It must have been a daring man who would have come down openly through these grounds on such an errand."

"Unless——" began Halstead thoughtfully.

"Well, unless—what, captain?"

"Mr. Dunstan, it's possible, isn't it, that one

of your men about the place may be disloyal to you? Such a man may have done this thing either to help your enemies, or to satisfy some spite against you."

"I can't think of a man in my employ I'd suspect of such a thing," murmured the troubled man.

Plainly the owner was not the man to discuss this suspicion with. Toward dark, however, Tom and Joe went to one man on the place whom they believed to be above all suspicion. That was big Michael, the coachman. With Michael, they discussed the matter long and earnestly.

Though the honest coachman could tell them nothing definite, Tom Halstead went away from that talk on a new scent of danger ahead.

Dawson, too, was thinking hard, and, as a consequenece, was even more quiet than usual.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be much use to go to Mr. Dunstan with this," sighed the young captain. "We'll just keep our eyes open."

CHAPTER XVI

FOLLOWING UP THE CLUE

THERE was plenty to do by the time the boys got back to the pier. Jed, lone-handed, was pumping gasoline into the tank through the strainer. Several barrels of the oil had been sent down to the water front. Stripping off their coats, Tom and Joe turned to and helped.

Bouncer, the bull pup, was on hand also, chained in the engine room. In view of the late near-tragedy Mr. Dunstan had decided to keep the dog aboard, at the home pier, hereafter, and had brought Bouncer down himself.

"We'll finish this job, Jed, if you'll turn to and cook up a quick supper," proposed Halstead.

"Anything on?" asked Jed, looking keenly at them.

"I shouldn't wonder," nodded the young captain.

Jed asked no more questions, but got a tempting supper ready in close to record time. As they were eating Tom told Jed, in low tones, the little they had discovered.

want to stay right here by the boat and keep a sharp eye on it, for Gambon may not be the one who is trying to put the 'Meteor' on the scrap heap. You'll have Bouncer to help you. Even if it came to taking the boat over to Wood's Hole, on a changed order, you're equal to it, aren't you?"

"Just give me the chance!" cried Jed. "I'd welcome it."

As soon as dark fell Joe stole across the grounds at the further end, stationing himself by the road. Tom, on the other hand, hid himself not far from Gambon's little cottage. This was the plan of the chums to prevent the Frenchman from giving them the slip, in case he had any suspicions. There was still a light in Gambon's cottage. After half an hour, however, the light vanished. Then Gambon came out, carrying a thick walking stick.

Tom watched the Frenchman until he was out of sight. Then after him the young skipper went on tip-toe. It was not difficult to keep quietly on the trail, for the gardener appeared far from suspicious.

Then, minutes later, Joe stepped out from behind a tree, touching Tom lightly on the arm. They went along together.

"It's easy so far," whispered Halstead.

"May be a reason," answered Joe. "Our

Frenchman may have nothing to conceal. Perhaps he's only going courting."

As Michael had reported, the gardener's route lay along the highway to Nantucket. The lights of the little town were in sight when Halstead suddenly gave Joe a nudge. Both dodged behind bushes. For the Frenchman had stepped off the road under some trees. First looking around him, Gambon next bent over, moving a stone twice the size of his head. He picked up a piece of paper. Tom and Joe were breathing hard by this time.

Carefully replacing the stone, Gambon struck a match, scanning the piece of paper he held in his hand. In another instant he touched the flaming match to a corner of the paper, watching it burn up.

"Confound him for that!" muttered Tom in his chum's ear.

Gambon was coming back now. The two friends crouched lower behind the bushes. By them walked the Frenchman, looking straight ahead. As soon as it seemed wise to do so the chums started after him. They saw him, however, return to his cottage, where he lighted his lamp, smoked and by and by extinguished the light and went to bed.

"We've found the spy," groaned Tom, as the two chums neared the pier. "It's fearful luck,

Joe, that we couldn't have known about him before. But it's too late now for the knowledge to do us any good. To-morrow is the last day for Ted Dunstan to show up. After we see that the boat and Jed are safe I'll run up to the house for a moment and see Mr. Dunstan."

When Tom told their employer, a little later, what they had discovered that gentleman at first appeared considerably interested.

"I'm afraid, though, Halstead," he commented, "that we're all of us inclined to suspect anything and anyone. Gambon is a bachelor and has saved a goodly bit of money. What more likely than that he may be courting a sweetheart? That would be a likely enough place for her to leave a note for him. Perhaps it was only a note as to an engagement that had to be broken for this evening, for, as you say, Gambon came right back. Whatever the note was about we'd probably feel rather ashamed if we forced the Frenchman to tell us about it. By the way, I am going to bed at once, now, for at at half-past five in the morning I shall want to start for Wood's Hole. I've heard from Crane again, and he's coming over with me at full speed, in order to be in court with me. We're going to see if we can't get an adjournment for one day. Of course, there seems little hope of it, as the terms of the will are so exacting. Oh,

Halstead, I made a huge mistake in letting the matter go so long!"

There were tears in Mr. Dunstan's eyes. Halstead, much touched, bade his employer good-night, returning to the boat.

CHAPTER XVII

JOE PLAYS JUSTICE A SCURVY TRICK

OVER a sea "as smooth as glass," that fateful Monday morning, the "Meteor" made a dashing run to Wood's Hole. It was just five minutes of seven by the clock when the swift craft tied up at the village on the mainland.

All through the trip Horace Dunstan had remained seated in one of the armchairs in the cockpit aft. His head had been bowed in sorrow. His face was haggard and ashen, for he had not slept through the night.

On the pier awaiting him stood Mr. Crane, his lawyer, and Musgrave, who had been in charge of the force of detectives who had been vainly seeking the young heir.

"You have not a word of hope, of course, gentlemen?" asked Mr. Dunstan in a weak voice.

"There is no news whatever," replied Musgrave.

"Our only hope," added Crane, "lies in the barest possibility that the court may find some legal excuse for adjourning the matter for a few days and giving us a chance for a longer hunt."

"May I put in a word?" asked Tom, who had been standing close by.

"Yes," assented Horace Dunstan.

"Now I know, and we all know," Halstead went on, "that Ted Dunstan has been illegally spirited away and that it is simply impossible for his father to produce him in court. It is no guess-work, for I have seen Ted Dunstan, alive, and with Mr. Dunstan's enemies. If you were to make the claim, Mr. Crane, and use me as a witness, would that help matters any in inducing the court to adjourn the matter? Could the court then legally postpone the bringing of the Dunstan heir into view?"

"I'm afraid not," replied the great lawyer thoughtfully. "In the first place, the court would have only Mr. Dunstan's word for it that he is really anxious to produce his son in court. There would be no evidence that could corroborate Mr. Dunstan's statement. As to your testimony, Captain Halstead, if it were admitted at all, it would work us the greatest harm, for you would be obliged to say, under oath, that Ted told you he was with those other people by his own choice as well as at his father's command."

Mr. Musgrave nodded. Horace Dunstan bowed his stricken head lower.

"I understand the force of what you say, Mr. Crane," Tom nodded.

"Hush! Here comes Judge Swan now," whispered the lawyer. "What can he be doing here?"

A portly, white-haired man, yet with a fresh, young-looking face, had just stepped onto the pier and came toward them. He was judge of the probate court over at Nantucket.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he greeted pleasantly. Then, by a nod, he drew Lawyer Crane toward him, though the judge spoke loudly enough for the rest to hear.

"Are you going to have a case to bring before me to-day, Mr. Crane?"

"Provided we can find young Theodore Dunstan in time, your honor," answered the lawyer. "Our search has been unceasing."

"I wish you the utmost measure of good fortune, then," replied Judge Swan. "Under the terms of the will, as I understand them, this is the last day of grace that you have. But remember, court will be open up to the minute of four this afternoon."

Mr. Crane thanked his honor. Every hearer present, however, realized that Judge Swan had answered, as far as his dignity and official posi-

tion permitted, how any appeal for postponement must be answered from the bench. The motion would be denied.

The justice turned to stroll apart from the rest, but the lawyer kept at his side.

"Judge," he asked in an undertone, "since you know the whole of our painful predicament, can you offer me any suggestion?"

"The most I can say, because it is the most I am able to say," murmured the judge, "is that I sincerely trust that Mr. Dunstan and yourself will be able to produce young Theodore in court before four o'clock this afternoon."

They soon turned, strolling back to the group.

"I feel a good deal annoyed," said Judge Swan, presently. "I was in Boston yesterday. My friend, Mr. Percival, was to start over to Nantucket with me at six this morning, in order that I might open court at nine o'clock. Mr. Percival wired me yesterday that his launch had broken down, but the telegram must have reached Boston after I had gone to the train. So I must go over on the forenoon passenger steamer, I fear."

"If we were going back sooner," explained Mr. Crane, "my client would be most happy to give you a seat on his boat. But we feel that, if young Theodore Dunstan is found, it will be

on the mainland. So we are waiting until the last moment."

"Yet, if heaven favors us," broke in Horace Dunstan, "we could take my son over on the regular forenoon passenger boat, and be in court this afternoon. The 'Meteor' could be back here soon after the passenger boat leaves. So, Judge, may I offer you the use of the 'Meteor?' "

"Do you mean that?" asked Judge Swan, looking at the owner in delight.

"Most assuredly," replied Mr. Dunstan. "I shall be glad, judge, if you will make use of my boat."

"Then I shall accept with great pleasure," replied his honor. "I know how swift your boat is."

"Then, captain," said Mr. Dunstan, turning to Halstead, "you understand your instructions, which are to get Judge Swan in Nantucket before nine o'clock this morning."

"It's the only boat in these waters that could do it," Tom replied, with pardonable pride, as he sprang aboard.

"Come back, captain, as soon as you land his honor," was Mr. Dunstan's parting word. "If you pass the passenger steamer, watch for me at her rail. I may signal you."

Before she had left the pier three hundred

yards behind, the nimble motor boat was going at better than twenty miles an hour. Gradually the speed was increased. Judge Swan stood on the bridge deck beside Tom.

"It is really exciting to travel on a boat like this," commented his honor, presently. "You must enjoy it, captain."

"I do sir, when the engine works all right, which it does usually," Halstead answered.

The sea as smooth as ever, and no hindering breeze blowing, the craft behaved splendidly, making within a notch of her best speed. In time they left Martha's Vineyard behind and headed out toward the big, green island of Nantucket.

"The engine isn't likely to break down this morning, is she?" asked the judge, who had just returned from a smoke aft.

"I don't think so, sir. It would make a sad mix-up in your court work if we got stuck out here on the open sea, wouldn't it, sir?"

"I imagine it would annoy my clerk a good deal," replied Judge Swan, reflectively. "He would have to sit in court all day without me, and then, when four o'clock came, he would, in my absence, be obliged to declare court adjourned until nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"And in that case there wouldn't be any le-

gal session of the court to-day, would there, sir?"

"There couldn't be a legal session in my absence. However, we'll trust that your engine won't meet with any mishap," replied Judge Swan, smiling and turning away.

Tom Halstead's hands began to tremble as he guided the wheel. There was a queer look in his eyes; his head was whirling a bit.

Had Judge Swan purposely given him a hint? It was a staggering thought. Halstead, when in doubt, was likely to think and act quickly.

"Come and relieve me at the wheel for a few moments, Jed," he called. Then, in a twinkling, the young skipper was down in the engine room.

"Joe," he whispered, breathlessly, to his chum, "the judge just informed me that, if anything went wrong with the engine, and we couldn't make Nantucket before four o'clock, there would be no legal session of probate court."

"Did he mean that for a hint?" queried Joe, his look becoming keen.

"I'll leave that for you to figure out, chum."

"Where are we, now?" was Dawson's next question.

Halstead informed him.

"Say," muttered Joe, "I wish you'd go up on deck and stay there a while. I want to attend to my work for a while."

Tom went back up on deck, lounging near Jed, at the wheel. It wasn't long before the speed slackened. Then the boat slowed down to mere headway. Even this soon ceased.

"I'll try not to hinder you long," called up Joe, showing his face in the hatchway. "I think I can soon get the engine fixed."

"Use all the speed you can, Joe, but do it well, whatever has to be done, Tom answered. Then he made his way aft to report to Judge Swan that the engineer had said he hoped the motor would soon be in order again.

"Are there any books aboard?" his honor wanted to know.

"There's a book-shelf in the cabin, sir."

Judge Swan disappeared into the cabin. The next time Halstead looked aft he saw the judge snug in one of the armchairs, reading.

The place was ideal for such a breakdown. The "Meteor" lay almost motionless upon the smooth sea, miles from land, with no troublesome reefs near. Under the awnings it was delightfully cool.

For an hour Joe remained in the motor room, neither Tom nor Jed bothering him with their presence. Then Tom went aft to see if their

guest was comfortable. Judge Swan looked up with a pleasant smile.

"If I didn't have that session of court on hand, captain, I wouldn't mind if this break lasted all day."

"It wouldn't be bad," the young skipper assented. "We have a good larder and a fine young cook aboard."

"How serious is the break?" inquired his honor.

"Why, Dawson reports that he hopes very soon to be under way again."

"I hope he won't hurry enough to interfere with thorough repair," pursued Judge Swan.

When Tom went forward again it occurred to him to take a look down into the engine room. The sight that met his gaze was a surprising one. Joe was lying on his back on one of the lockers, the first time he had ever been asleep at his post!

The time dragged on slowly. His honor, being wholly comfortable and well occupied where he was, didn't come forward to ask any questions.

"There's the forenoon boat coming," whispered Jed, at last.

"Confound it," muttered Tom. "I wish I had thought to keep better out of her track."

The passenger steamer soon signaled. Tom answered on the auto whistle.

Then the passenger steamer ran in closer to the motor boat. The captain of the steamer, standing before the pilot house, megaphone in hand, called over the waters:

"Are you in distress?"

"Only a temporary break in the engine," Tom answered, through his megaphone.

"Do you need any assistance?"

"No, thank you," Halstead responded.

"Do you wish to transfer any passengers?"

Judge Swan came forward to the young skipper. At the same time Tom saw Mr. Dunstan and Mr. Crane at the rail, among the boat's passengers.

"How soon before you'll be under way, Captain Halstead?" asked his honor.

Now, Joe being fast asleep, Halstead had to answer for his friend.

"Judge, we ought to be under way soon."

"Then tell the captain of the steamer you've no passengers to transfer," directed his honor, next starting aft once more.

"No passengers to transfer, captain, thank you," Tom answered.

"All right, 'Meteor.' Wish you good luck!" A moment later, after both craft had whistled, the passenger steamer continued on her way.

Now, it was too bad, of course, but noon came and found the "Meteor" still unable to proceed. Soon after that Jed appeared, setting up a table in the cockpit. A cloth was laid, and a pleasing luncheon spread before the delayed judge. Joe came to at the first mention of food, and the three members of the crew ate forward.

"It's a mean thing to have such a break out on the open," Joe complained, as he finished eating. "However, I'll do the best I can for you."

The afternoon began to slip by. It was considerably after three o'clock when Joe thrust his head up through the hatchway to say:

"Captain, if you'll be satisfied to go at slow speed, I think we can make a start now."

"Then start her, and keep to whatever speed your judgment decides upon," Tom replied. Making his way aft he informed Judge Swan.

"I am delighted to hear it, of course," replied that gentleman. "I must, however, give you credit for commanding a boat aboard which a very pleasant day of idleness can be enjoyed."

The "Meteor" was soon going at a speed that seemed lame and halting for her. She made the harbor at Nantucket, however, at 4.20, and landed her distinguished passenger. Judge Swan shook hands with all three boys, thanking them for his pleasant day.

Knowing that Mr. Dunstan was not at Wood's

Hole, Tom decided to make the run straight to the home pier. Leaving Jed at the wheel, after they were out of the harbor, the young skipper went below.

"Joe," he asked soon, "what was wrong with the engine?"

"The vaporizer," Joe replied briefly.

"What ailed it?"

"Why, you see," Dawson replied calmly, "after the speed stopped I disconnected the vaporizer and put it in one of the lockers. Then, somehow, I forgot all about that vaporizer for some hours. When I thought of it I got it out of the locker, wiped it off on some waste, connected it again—and then the engine began to behave fairly well."

Tom's lips puckered. Whistling, he turned his face away from his chum, looking out through one of the portholes.

"What's the matter?" inquired Dawson, looking up in some surprise.

"Joe," retorted the young skipper, "don't you think that was rather a scurvy trick to play on justice?"

"Trick?" repeated Joe in an injured voice. "Well, if you call that a 'trick,' my captain, then all I have to say is that Judge Swan didn't seem to be very much upset about it."

"There having been no legal session of pro-

bate court to-day," Tom went on, "that gives our friends one day of grace in which to find Ted Dunstan."

"I wish it were a year more, instead of a day," sighed Dawson.

"I wonder," muttered Tom, as though talking to himself. "I wonder whether Judge Swan hinted himself aboard the 'Meteor' just so Joe could play that scurvy, unmannerly trick against the blind goddess of justice? I wonder!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MESSAGE UNDER THE ROCK

"AND so you've gained until another day, anyway, sir," Tom wound up his account of the "accident" to the "Meteor's" mòtor.

"I fear it will do us but little good," sighed Horace Dunstan. "I feel that possibility in the way of search has been exhausted. It looks as though we were doomed to defeat."

"I don't like to think, Mr. Dunstan, that any such thing as defeat is possible as long as there's more time left us," was Halstead's answer.

"I trust, my young friend, that your faith will be justified."

"Any instructions for to-night, sir?"

"No; nothing remains to be done and you young men deserve your rest at last."

"Then Joe and I may stretch our legs on shore."

"That will be all right, as long as Jed Prentiss and Bouncer remain aboard to watch the boat."

Joe started first that night, hurrying away before Gambon had left his cottage. Tom remained behind, in hiding near the gate, to follow the Frenchman. Gambon came out, half an hour after dark, armed with the same heavy walking stick. As before, he turned straight in the direction of Nantucket, the young skipper following just out of sight.

To-night there seemed to be more need of caution. Several times the Frenchman turned or halted and listened, but each time the young skipper was not to be seen.

Just before Gambon reached the grove where the rock lay Joe stepped up beside his chum.

"There's a message there and I read it," whispered Joe.

"What was it?" Tom eagerly demanded.

"Simply this: 'Oceanside, 332.'"

"What do you make of that, Joe?"

"Telephone number is my guess."

"It must be. You put the message back under the rock?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Then, see here, Joe. I'm going to slip into the woods and hurry on ahead to Nantucket. I'll find out where 'Oceanside, 332,' is. You follow Gambon, and see if he goes to a telephone. If he does, try to hear what's said. Whatever you do to-night, though, Joe, don't let Gambon get out of your sight. Remember, slim as it is, it's our last chance!"

"And you?"

"All I can say," Tom replied, "is that you'll see me again, old fellow, whenever and wherever we happen to meet. Good-by, now, and be sharp to-night."

"Good luck to you, Tom."

Moving through the woods, Halstead was quickly in Nantucket. In a drug store he picked up the telephone directory, scanning the pages until he located "Oceanside, 332." He could have jumped from sheer excitement. It was the telephone number of the farmer, Sanderson, on the east side of the island. Sanderson was the man who had been receiving so many cases of "machinery" from the mainland.

Slipping out of the drug store, Halstead went swiftly down one of the side streets. He did not want to run any risk of encountering Gambon.

"So the scene shifts back to Sanderson's!" thought the young skipper excitedly. "Then if

Don Emilio's crowd isn't there, there must at least be some one there who has authority to telephone orders to Gambon. Whatever those orders are Joe will have to find out—if he can."

Down at the further end of this side street, as Captain Tom knew, was a shop where a bicycle could be rented. Within two minutes the boy felt the saddle of a wheel under him. He pedaled fast, yet he did not take the principal highway that led past Sanderson's.

"There's too much chance of being seen by the wrong folks if I go openly on the main road," Tom told himself.

From Jed he had learned the lay of the roads in that part of the island. Well trained to sailing by chart, Halstead found that he could pick his roads and paths, even at night, from the mental map of the east side of the island that Jed had supplied him.

When he dismounted it was on a side road, at a distance of a quarter of a mile from Sanderson's house. Most of the land between was covered by young woods.

First of all, Halstead looked about for a thicket that offered a secure hiding place for his rented wheel. When that had been stowed away the young skipper secured his bearings once more.

"And now to see what's going on at Sander-

son's to-night, and who's there," Halstead told himself, as he plunged through the woods in what he knew must be the right direction.

After a few minutes he came out in the open. Ahead the well-remembered old farmhouse showed dimly in the darkness.

The night was so dark that Tom could easily approach the house, though he kept a keen lookout against running unexpectedly into anyone. Cautiously he surveyed the house from all sides. The two lower floors were in darkness and had a closed-up appearance. Through one of the rear attic windows, however, a bright light shone and the sash was raised.

"Sanderson, Don Emilio and some of the others may be meeting up there," thought Halstead with a sudden thrill of wonder. "Oh, if I can only find a way to get up there and listen!"

As he stood, well in the shadow of a carriage shed, staring up at that lighted window, a hum of low voices came to his ears.

"Gracious!" muttered the young skipper, stepping further back into the shadow. "There's crowd enough down here on the ground."

On came a group of men, trudging like laborers going to their toil. Dark as the night was, not one of them carried a lantern. From their course it looked as though they came up from

the shore. In his eagerness Tom bent forward more, that he might scan them. His eyes were keen-sighted in the dark.

"There's Don Emilio," Halstead told himself. "I'd know him by his size and his walk. And there's Jonas French. There's the little brown chap, I think, who helped to capture Joe the other night. And that stooping figure at the rear is Sanderson. But there are four others."

"I am not used to this hard work, but I will do all I can," Tom heard Don Emilio complain, as the group stopped before one of the larger outbuildings, while Sanderson drew out a key and unfastened a padlock.

"Whew!" Tom Halstead thrilled more intensely than before when he saw the men come out of the other building, two and two, each pair carrying a long box. "This must be one of their big nights. Yet what on earth is up?"

He was destined, soon, to be able to make a good guess.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SIGHT BEHIND THE ATTIC LIGHT

"ALL right?" asked Farmer Sanderson questioningly.

"All right," agreed Don Emilio.

Click went the padlock.

"All wrong, I'll bet a hundred cookies," mocked Tom Halstead under his breath.

"Come along, now," directed Don Emilio. He seemed to be the leader in to-night's work.

"I don't believe I'm included in that invitation to 'come along,' but I'm going to cheek my way along," grinned the young skipper.

He had no need to keep them exactly in sight, these industrious workers in the dark. Laden as they were, it was enough to keep within sound of the rather regular shuffle of their feet.

As Tom had surmised, the four pairs of men, keeping together, proceeded toward the shore. Once, on the way down the slope, they halted to give the weaker ones an opportunity to rest their muscles. Then, picking up their heavy cases once more, the men went on down the slope toward the pier.

"That is the stuff that was billed under 'machinery' labels!" muttered the young skipper to himself. "I'll wager those boxes contain guns and cartridges to start a new revolution with down in stormy Honduras. But is their filibustering craft here? Are they getting ready to sail before daylight? If that's the game, then I must get awfully busy."

As Tom, taking advantage of the uneven ground and dodging behind bushes and trees, followed unobserved and came within sight of

the pier he made out with certainty that no craft was tied there.

"That doesn't prove a lot, though," he reflected, watching the procession of toilers from behind a bush. "If they have a tug or some other steam vessel it could slip in here two hours before daylight and be away again in another hour. But what's that? Where are they going now?"

In the darkness it was not quite easy to see more than that the procession had moved into the shadow of a depression in the ground near the pier. Crawling that he might not be seen against the dim skyline, Halstead secured another point of observation. He thought, now, he could make out the outlines of a small building.

"I'll wait until the crowd gets away from there before I try for a closer look," thought the young motor boat skipper.

Nor had he long to wait ere the same eight filed by not far from his hiding place. Halstead watched until they were out of sight behind Sanderson's house.

Then the youthful investigator slipped down the slope and into the shadow. He went cautiously, though, for fear that Don Emilio might have posted a guard below.

There was none, however. Tom found himself staring at what looked like a new boat-

house on shore, such as is used for the winter storing of yachts or motor boats. There were no windows. The door, a strong affair, was secured by a padlock.

"If they're putting the stuff in there and locking it up, then they don't intend to ship it to-night," Halstead wisely decided.

He had learned, apparently, all that was to be learned at this point. To keep his eyes upon the case-carrying toilers might mean only to witness a repetition of the same monotonous work through all the night.

"That one bright light up in the attic," Halstead wondered, the memory of it coming back to him. "I wonder what's going on up there? And I mean to know, too."

Satisfied that he knew all about the water-front business, Halstead took such a wide, curving sweep in getting back to the farmhouse that he ran no risk of running into the busy eight.

Once more he sought the deep shadow of the wagon shed, from which point he stared long and wonderingly.

Beneath that attic window was a kitchen annex of one story. And Tom made out, presently, that a lightning rod ran down the back of the main building close to that brilliantly lighted window on the third floor. The rod

touched the roof of the kitchen annex, running thence down to the ground.

"It's a job for stocking feet, anyway," Halstead decided at last. Having removed his shoes and feeling about in the dark, the young skipper ran his hand against a coil of rope hanging on a peg.

"Good enough!" he cried inwardly. "I don't believe there are many climbing jobs where a rope won't come in handy."

As he removed the coil of rope from the peg he discovered a few lengths of cord. These he stuffed into one of his pockets.

"For I can't tell what kind of a sling I may need to rig before I get through," he thought.

The busy eight were returning from still another trip to the water front. Halstead stopped all movement, remaining utterly quiet until they had started shoreward with the next load.

"Now I've got to work fast," thought Captain Tom thrilling. "I reckon it's about fifteen minutes between their arrivals here. That means fast work, my boy."

Shoes in hand, the coil of rope fast at his waist, Halstead stole out toward the southern side of the kitchen annex. Leaving his shoes on the ground Tom found it an easy task to climb up onto the roof of the annex. Now he felt carefully of the lightning rod, next giving it

harder and harder pulls, to make sure that it was strong enough to bear his weight. That point settled, Halstead began to ascend. It was not a difficult task for a boy trained aboard sea-going craft.

Up and up he went, making little if any sound. At last he was able to lean outward from the rod, resting one elbow on the ledge of the lighted window. Yet, on peering into the room the young skipper received a shock that almost caused him to lose his hold on the lightning rod.

At the further end of the bare-looking attic stood a plain pine table, which held a reading lamp that gave a strong light. With his back to the window, seated in a rocking chair and his feet on another chair, lounged a boy, reading.

Even with his back turned, the unseen face bent over a book, that boy was known beyond the possibility of a doubt to Tom Halstead.

"Ted Dunstan, himself!" the young skipper almost cried aloud.

Not for one moment did Halstead even think of slipping down from the window and running for help. If he did so Ted was as likely as not to be gone upon his return.

"I've got to get him out of here, and on the jump, too," puzzled the young captain. "But how is the thing to be done?"

An appeal to young Ted himself would be

worse than useless. That young heir, as the spy at the window knew, had altogether too complete a faith in his present comrades.

While Tom still hung on there another happening caused his heart to bump against his ribs. The busy eight were returning. He could hear the light tread on gravel under their feet.

Not a second was to be lost. Inwardly breathing a prayer, Halstead raised himself to the window sill with the utmost stealth. In another moment he was over the sill, and in the room on his stockinged tip-toes. Ted did not turn. Plainly he was too absorbed in his book to suspect any other presence. Not daring, of course, to remain near the window, which would place him in sight of the busy eight in the yard, as soon as they should reach the outbuildings, Halstead slid noiselessly along the wall, pressing his hands against it. His strained, intense look was all the time on the unsuspecting Dunstan heir.

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Master Ted, throwing his head back, but he did not look around. Evidently something in the book on his lap amused him immensely.

Tom stood there, still praying under his breath, praying that the eight might quickly take up their new burdens and hasten shoreward.

At last there came the sound of crunching against gravel. Tom, trying to stifle the sound of his own breathing, listened intently until the dying out of sounds outside made him believe that the men were once more out of the way.

Now trembling in every muscle, Halstead stole forward toward the Dunstan heir. The floor creaked; he stopped short in great alarm. For Halstead felt certain that, somewhere near at hand, there must be some one intrusted with the responsibility of watching over this young heir.

Master Ted, however, did not turn. Taking heart Tom stole forward as softly as ever Indian trod. Crouching, he was near enough now to reach out and touch the back of young Dunstan.

Of a sudden Halstead made the plunge. He leaped forward with the agility of a panther, fairly yanking Ted Dunstan out of the rocking chair and dropping him softly on the floor beside it.

Taken in this fashion, Master Ted would have let out a lusty yell. Yet the instant he opened his mouth Tom Halstead's fingers gripped at his throat, shutting off the youngster's wind.

"I don't want to hurt you," whispered Halstead sharply yet half apologetically. "But I've got to keep you quiet no matter what I have to do to you."

Ted's face betrayed absolute fear as well as unmistakable loathing, as that choking shut off his breath. His mouth opened, his tongue lolling out.

"Now you may breathe again, if you'll keep quiet," Tom informed him. "But, remember—I *won't* have any noise!"

As soon as he could breathe again panting Ted's wits also began to clear. He raised one of his feet, as he lay prostrate with Halstead a-top of him, and brought that heel down against the floor. Halstead promptly threw his own body so that Master Ted could not again raise either foot.

"I see that I've got to go to extreme measures with you; you don't understand that I'm deadly in earnest," panted Tom, finding that this wiry, out-of-door, agile boy of ten could be wonderfully slippery. "Now listen, Ted Dunstan. If you don't want me to be ugly and to choke you until your senses fade, then prepare to mind me. Now then roll over on your face—and don't you *dare* to make any noise doing it."

A good deal cowed by the fierce glint in Tom's eyes, Ted almost passively obeyed, though the young skipper was obliged to roll the young man himself.

"Keep those feet quiet now," whispered Tom in the little fellow's ear. "We've got to the

point where nonsense won't be safe for you. Now open your mouth!"

Ted firmly pressed his lips together, gritting his teeth. Yet Tom knew a trick of wrestling that forced the young man to open his mouth. Plump into that mouth went one of Halstead's wadded handkerchiefs, stopping the youngster's tongue down and holding his jaws apart.

Satisfied that Ted was gagged, Tom forced another handkerchief between the teeth, knotting it behind the smaller boy's head. Then, with abrupt suddenness, the young skipper bent the little fellow's hands behind him, though not too roughly, and bound the wrists in the best sailorman's fashion. Now Tom turned about, using more of the cord in his pockets to lash the heels of the Dunstan heir securely together. This accomplished, Captain Tom examined all his knots to make sure that none of them was so poorly tied as to cause him regret later on. Then, on tip-toe, he stole over to the door. There was a bolt on it unsecured. Tom softly slipped the bolt into place. There was now no danger of unannounced interference from that direction.

Going back to the angry and astounded Dunstan heir, Halstead knelt beside him.

"Master Ted, I know you feel ugly about me and you hate me just at this minute. You think

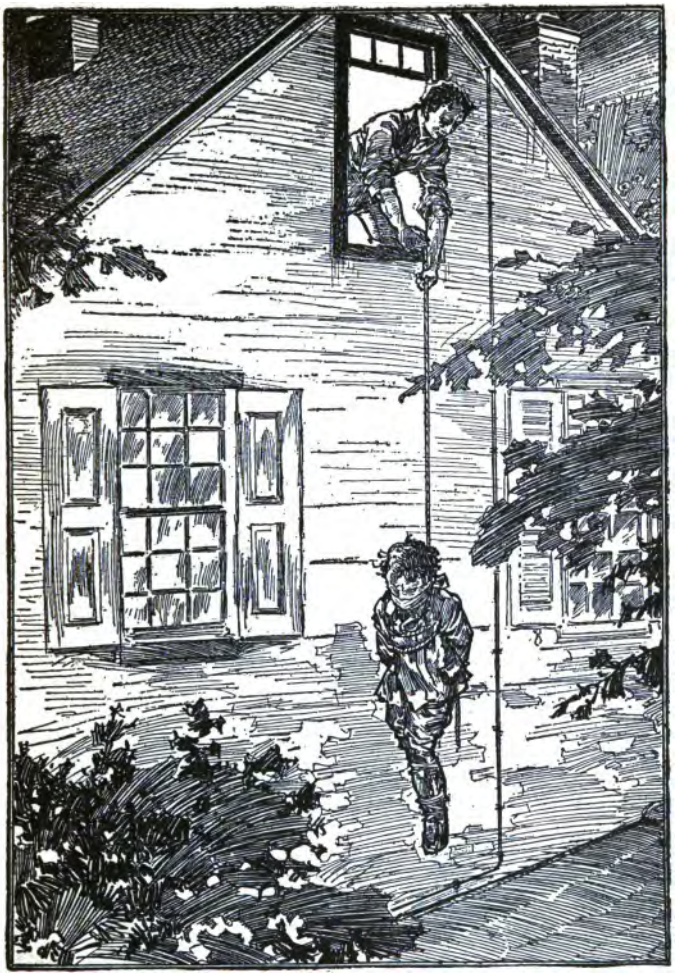
I'm your enemy and your father's. The scoundrels you've been running with have told you that. The truth is, your father, though not an old man, is aging fast on account of the agony your disappearance has caused him. The time isn't far away when you'll know that we've all been doing our best, in the face of many dangers, to serve a boy who was foolish enough not to want to be served."

Captain Tom had raised young Dunstan's head and had looked into the latter's eyes while telling him this. But Master Ted glared back only a message of distrust and defiance.

"I've got you now where you can't stand in the way of your own good luck, if only I can once get you away from this house," Tom went on in a whisper, his mouth close to one of the youngster's ears. "*You* can't hinder, anyway."

Then, with one hand resting heavily on Ted, to prevent any slight possibility of movement by that youngster, Halstead continued kneeling and listening.

At last there came to him the sound for which he had waited—the crunching of feet on the gravel outside. Now Halstead became busy again. Uncoiling the rope at his waist he rigged a secure slip-noose at one end. This he made fast around Ted's body, under his bound



Tom Pushed the Heir Through the Window.

arms. When the sounds without indicated that the eight men were again leaving for the shore, the young captain raised his light human burden, stealing toward the window.

There was not a sound outside. Tom Halstead pushed the Dunstan heir through the window, lowering him swiftly to the kitchen annex. The young motor boat captain then descended by the lightning rod. He carried Ted, naturally unresisting, to the edge of the annex, lowering him to the ground. Halstead went down himself at a bound, landing on his feet. In a fever of anxiety he found his shoes, swiftly lacing them on.

Now slipping off the noose, Tom loosely coiled the rope about one arm. Lifting Ted Dunstan, Captain Halstead fled straight across the rear yard and in among the trees.

"There, I hope we've got you away from that crowd," panted Tom, putting his unwilling companion down. "But we've got to hustle, so you'll have to use your own feet a bit. Woe unto you, though, if you try any tricks on the stranger who happens to be your best friend at this moment!"

Hiding the rope in a thicket near by, Halstead quickly slashed away the cord at Ted Dunstan's ankles.

"Now, you'll come along with me and you'll

come mighty fast!" breathed Captain Tom resolutely, as he seized one of the boy's arms.

At first Ted acted as though he intended to drag, but the quality of muscle in the young motor boat skipper's arms must have shown him the folly of such tactics, for presently he trotted at the older boy's side.

Yet they had not gone more than two hundred yards before something else happened. Out from behind a tree shot a human figure. Its owner sprang at Tom Halstead, locking him in a sturdy embrace. Down to the ground went Halstead and his assailant, rolling over and over in fierce, battling embrace.

Ted Dunstan lost not an instant in seeing and seizing his opportunity. His feet, at least, free and able, that youngster whirled and dashed back toward the farmhouse.

CHAPTER XX

BLIND MAN'S BUFF IN FEARFUL EARNEST

FOR a few seconds the two combatants fought strenuously in the darkness.

"Now, I've got you!" growled the assailant, wrapping his arms around young Captain Halstead.

But that astounded youth only gasped:

"Joe!"

"Tom! Pompey's ghost! Is this you?"

Joe Dawson rolled swiftly from his point of vantage, and the chums sprang instantly to their feet.

"That was Ted Dunstan who got away," quivered Halstead.

"I know it," admitted Joe. "I thought you were one of the other crowd. I had eyes only for him, when I saw him."

"Quick, then!"

They could hear Master Ted running, somewhat uncertainly, in the woods, with which he seemed to be unfamiliar. Yet he was nearing the opening where the house stood.

After him pelted both motor boat boys. Ted heard them coming, of course, and increased his speed. Yet Ted must have gotten into the opening, but for an accident. One of his feet tripped over something. Down he went, and, with his hands tied behind him, it was not the simplest task in the world for him to get on his feet again. Just as he did accomplish it, Tom and Joe reached him, grasping him on either side. Ted made a slight, useless struggle, but what he did succeed in doing was to kick a tree rather resoundingly.

The busy eight, unsuspicious until then, had

just returned to the rear yard. Some of them heard that kick against the tree.

"What was that noise?" demanded Don Emilio.

"Nothing," replied Jonas French.

"Come on! I want to make sure, anyway. Hasten!"

Tom, leading the way, and Joe, bringing up the rear with Ted Dunstan gripped in his arms, were in motion, but Don Emilio and several of his comrades pursued at lively speed.

"There's some one running in these woods," called back Don Emilio. "Spread out, and travel fast!"

When they had gone some little distance Tom fell back, snatching Ted from Joe's arms. They ran until they came to a low-hanging thicket. Burdened as the motor boat boys were, the race must prove an unequal one. Joe halted at the thicket, holding out his arm to stop Tom. The two crept in under there with their burden, Joe holding the Dunstan heir's feet.

And just in time, too, for Don Emilio and Jonas French went by within striking distance.

"Whoever it was didn't get as far as the road," the boys heard Don Emilio declare, not far away. "French, you stay here. If you see a living figure in the road you'll know what to

do. I'll send another man to watch with you. These woods have got to be searched."

Just at that moment some one else must have reached Don Emilio Alvarez and must have reported, for the Honduran's voice screamed:

"What do you say? The youngster's gone from the attic? Listen, men! Let nothing stand in your way, now. We must have that boy back. We'll watch the road and drag the woods. Waste no sympathy on any meddler you find!"

It was at once made plain to the motor boat boys that Don Emilio and his comrades were now frantic. Everywhere could be heard the steps, or the low voices of the searchers. Tom and Joe dreaded capture at each instant. Dawson had made it his task to secure Ted's feet again, and to hold them doubly secure with his own hands.

Once, as some of the searchers went by, Gambon's voice was heard. Joe nudged his chum; the latter understood how the young engineer of the "Meteor" had come so handily upon the scene through trailing the Frenchman here. Not once, after they had hidden themselves, did the motor boat boys dare to stir. Their covering, though dense enough in the dark, was thin at best. Two or three times some of the searchers passed by within a yard

of those they sought. At such times Ted Dunstan's body shook with suppressed emotion. But he was so tied and held that he could not make a sign to betray himself. Whenever the seekers came close Halstead reached out a hand holding the young heir's nostrils closed, so that he could not even sniff.

The conviction of Don Emilio that his longed-for prey was close at hand was shown by the repeated searchings over an area of barely more than five acres. The time even slipped into hours without the hunt being abandoned.

Half the time Tom and Joe felt as though their hearts were up in their throats, so close did discovery seem. The first gray streaks of dawn showed at last, but Don Emilio would not agree that the chase extend beyond this strip of lonely woods.

"It is more important than anything else could be that we should find the boy," Tom heard the Honduran explain to Gambon. "And daylight will show that they have not gotten away from here. It was here that the sounds of flight stopped. Somewhere, within a stone's throw or two we shall yet come upon the meddlers in hiding. I shall not give up."

"Confound him," whispered Joe, a little later, in his chum's ear. "Before this I always admired persistency."

Following the first dawn the light came in more strongly. Now, the two chums crouched more closely than ever, also seeing to it that Master Ted was forced to lie as flat as possible.

Joe Dawson, lying flat on his stomach, peering out beyond their retreat, moved one of his feet restlessly. Something made him turn to glance behind him. With that he began to slide slowly backward. His feet went further and further into a narrow hole. Then, after nudging Halstead in one leg, Dawson crept back until only his shoulders were exposed. Tom watched his chum in overjoyed wonder. Joe's next performance was to vanish from sight. Then, very soon, he wriggled silently out again, until his lips were beside one of his comrade's ears.

"There's a hole running into that hummock there," Dawson explained. "It is a crampy little bit of a hole, but it will conceal all three of us. Let's work Ted in there first."

This they proceeded to do, though with intense stealth and no hurry. They got Ted out of sight under the ground, at last, then more speedily concealed themselves.

"Fine, Joe, fine!" cheered Halstead, in a chuckling whisper. "Our chances of not being found have improved a hundred times!"

"If only Alvarez and his infernal crew will get away from this spot," Joe whispered, in answer. "But the day that is beginning is absolutely the last day to save Ted's fortune to him. If we trip up to-day there isn't a chance of any kind left. He'll simply lose!"

Tom kept his face close enough to the opening in the ground so that he could see outside for some little distance, and yet was sure that he himself was enough in the shadow not to be seen from outside.

By the time that the sun was well up Don Emilio insisted on another keen search. This time French and Gambon even trod through the edge of the thicket that had concealed the boys during the darkness. But the mouth of the hole under the hummock was still hidden from their eyes by other bushes.

By the time that the sun had been up for some time quiet had fallen in these woods. Tom and Joe might have felt tempted to make a sudden break for freedom, but the scratch of a match, not far away, warned them that at least one watcher was still in hiding.

"I wonder what time it is," thought tormented Halstead, his mind ever upon that fateful session of probate court over at Nantucket. He got his watch out, holding it before his face. Then he made an appalling discovery. He had

forgotten to wind up the time-piece, and it had run down.

"Your watch going, Joe?" the young skipper asked.

"No," Dawson whispered back, after a moment spent in investigation.

"This is a pretty fix. We can't even guess how much time we have left to get out of here and over to Nantucket."

It was not long after that a gentle sound attracted Halstead's notice to his friend. Sleepless and worn out, Dawson had fallen into slumber.

"That'll be all right," thought Tom, "if only he doesn't snore. If he does, I'll have to hold his nose and pull him out of it."

As for Ted, the idea of making a snoring sound didn't seem to have occurred to him, or he would have tried it. Tom moved closer to the little fellow, that he might be at hand to prevent any such attempt to send warning outside their cramped retreat.

Whizz-zz! It was an automobile going by at high speed. It passed and was gone, almost at once, but the sound gave Tom a good idea how close they lay to the road. Yet it was surely a lonely road, little traveled, for time went dragging by without any other sound of travel.

"I'd feel starving if I weren't so fearfully

anxious," thought Tom. "Joe is lucky that he can sleep. He'll forget how awfully hungry he is. As for poor Ted, his mixture of feelings must be something wonderful!"

In time, Halstead found himself fighting drowsiness. The very thought that he might fall asleep so filled him with fright that he became alertly awake. Slumber and a snore or two might be enough to break their last slim chance of winning out for the Dunstans.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST DASH TO WIN

"WHAT time is it, anyway?" breathed Joe.

That youth had awakened at last. He and Tom were discussing in whispers what it was best to do. While they were still deliberating, a scraping as though of a knife in a pipe-bowl, not a hundred yards away, had told them that watchers were still about. That had brought out Joe's question.

"I don't know. I'm going to see if I can make a guess," hazarded Halstead.

He crawled forward, thrusting his head a little beyond the mouth of the hole, though still concealed by the thicket.

He tried to get at the position of the sun in the sky, but at first the limited view he could obtain was bewildering. At last, however, Halstead guessed at the position of the sun with a result that made him feel heartsick.

"Joe," he faltered, after wriggling back into the hole, "I'm sure it must be afternoon. At that rate, we're in our last minutes of chance. If we reach Nantucket later than four o'clock we might about as well not get there at all."

"I'm with you for the dash, then," breathed Joe, hard. "I don't doubt though, that the Alvarez crowd will go to any extreme, even shooting, if they get sight of us. They're just as desperate as we feel. However, when you're ready to lead the dash, pass the word, and I'll hand Ted Dunstan out."

An impatient snort came from that helpless young man.

"Now, see here," whispered Joe, warningly, as he gripped tightly at the heir's arm, "just leave any sign of noise out. If you don't—well, you'll find me bad-tempered when I get roused."

Tom once more stuck his head out into the thicket. He had no doubt that it was already afternoon. Yes, surely, all must be risked on the one last dash to win.

As he looked about him, and listened, he heard a new sound. It made his heart beat fast. The sound was such as would come from the slow-running gear of an automobile.

"Hear it, Joe?" he whispered, drawing his head in.

"Yes!"

"Stay here. Don't venture out, unless I call you, Joe. But I'm going to try to get out and stop that machine. The Alvarez crew wouldn't, or oughtn't, dare do anything too ugly with other folks at hand. I'm going to risk it, anyway."

An instant later Tom Halstead's body was half-way out of the hole, though still concealed by the friendly thicket. He waited until he judged that the approaching automobile was close at hand on the nearby road.

Just as he was about to spring forth Halstead realized that even the auto might be a part of the Alvarez equipment. Yet, on the one last breath of a chance nothing was to be wasted by hesitation.

Judging the sound intently, Captain Tom suddenly leaped forth from the hole, out of the thicket, and sprinted headlong for the road. Nor had he misjudged his time. A touring car was coming along, less than fifty feet away, as Halstead reached the low stone wall. There

were, including the man at the steering wheel, four men in the car.

"Stop! stop!" shouted Tom, waving his cap. "It's fearfully important!"

As the car rolled to a stop, and the men in it leaned forward, Captain Tom experienced another great throb. One of the men in the rear seat he recognized as an officer who had joined in the search on the first day of Ted's disappearance.

"Oh, Mr. Warren, get out here, quick!" appealed the young skipper. "There's real and swift work in your line as deputy sheriff!"

Halstead's excited manner and white face were enough, in themselves, to carry conviction. Warren and another man leaped from the tonneau, each reaching carelessly at a hip pocket as though to make sure that a weapon was securely there.

"Yes, yes!" cried the delighted young motor boat skipper. "Get your pistols out. You may need 'em."

Then, wheeling, Tom shouted back:

"Joe! Come here on the jump! It's all safe, now!"

There was a sound of scrambling back at the thicket and hummock. Next, Dawson almost flung Ted Dunstan ahead of him, then sprang

out, snatching up the slight body in his arms and running toward them.

"Now, let us into your car, and let us get away from here," begged Tom, while Warren, staring at Joe's burden, gasped:

"You've got——"

"The Dunstan heir!" Halstead finished for him. "And the Alvarez crew are thick about here. Don't lose a moment."

Joe leaped into the tonneau, passing up his burden ahead of him. The rest crowded in. The man at the steering wheel let out a few notches of speed, and the car shot ahead. For a few seconds nothing was heard from any hostile watcher. Then a rifle report sounded, crisp and brisk, and a bullet sang by close over their heads.

"I'm not going to have the law made a target of in that fashion," uttered Warren. "Stop the auto, and I'll go back to give them all the fight they want."

"But wait until we get the Dunstan lad safe in Nantucket," begged Halstead.

"I guess you're right about that," nodded the deputy sheriff.

Instead of stopping, the man at the steering wheel had put on a burst of speed.

Ted, bound and gagged, just as he had been, was being held on the knee of one of the men.

"What time is it?" inquired Captain Tom.

"Twenty-five minutes of four," replied Warren, hauling out his watch.

"Less than half an hour to fix up everything!" gasped Tom his face blanching. "Oh, we must do some tall hurrying!"

"Why, we can be in the village in ten minutes," replied Deputy Sheriff Warren, soothingly.

"Yes, but this young man's father and lawyer must be in court, too, before four o'clock. Stop at the very first house where you see a telephone wire running in, will you?"

Within two minutes the man at the steering wheel began to slow down. He ran up before a cottage, stopping at the gate.

Tom leaped out before the car came to a full stop. Running to the door, he encountered a pleasant-faced young woman.

"Let me use your telephone, in a hurry, will you?" panted Halstead. "It's on the law's business."

"Why, yes, of course," replied the woman, smiling at the youth's flushed, excited face.

She pointed to the instrument in the hall.

"Give me Horace Dunstan's place, on the *west* shore, like lightning, will you, Central?" begged Tom, as soon as he had rung.

He got the Dunstan place. The butler an-

swered that Mr. Dunstan was not at home, but at the Stillman House in Nantucket, with Mr. Crane.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Captain Tom?" continued the butler. "You and Dawson being away, the master imagined that you might be on the track of the young gentleman. So, this afternoon, right after luncheon, Mr. Dunstan and Mr. Crane went over to the Stillman House to wait for any news that might come."

"I've found Master Ted, and we're trying to rush him to the court house in time. I'll call up Mr. Dunstan, thank you."

With that he rung off, asking for the Stillman House. Nor did it need more than a few seconds to get that anxious father to the telephone. He had been waiting for such a call, hoping against hope.

In the fewest words possible Halstead told his employer the bare news of finding the Dunstan heir, adding that they were now on the way to the court house with him.

"Be over there, you and Mr. Crane," urged Halstead, feverishly. "We will do our best to reach you in time. Now—we've got to hustle —good by, sir!"

Again ringing off, then uttering a breathless "Thank you," and leaving a quarter of a dollar to pay tolls, Tom dashed out of the house.

Just as he had disappeared into the house, Warren turned to Joe, asking curiously:

"Why have you got the lad bound and gagged in this fashion?"

"Because he wouldn't come any other way," retorted Joe.

"Can't we just as well remove the cords and the gag, now?" insisted the deputy sheriff.

"Yes; if you'll be responsible for his not getting away," agreed Dawson.

"Oh, I won't let him get away, if he's foolish enough to want to," promised Warren. He freed the young man. As soon as he could talk Ted broke forth, angrily:

"This is all a wicked shame! My father wanted me to keep out of the way for the present. These boys have been meddling from the start. My father will be awfully angry with them, and with you all."

"He will, eh?" queried Warren, good-humoredly. "Young man, do you know that your father is nearly distracted over your absence, and that he has had a lot of police officers and a small army of detectives hunting for you all these days?"

"I don't believe it," retorted Ted, stubbornly. "Anyway, I haven't broken any law, and you've no right to keep me here. I'm going to get out of this car."

"I'm very sorry to say that you're not, at least not until I've seen your father," rejoined the deputy. "My boy, I believe you've been badly imposed upon by rascals. In any case, you'll stay right here with me until some one older than you are changes the orders."

At this moment Tom came running down the path from the house.

"There's the fellow who's been the worst of the lot," cried Ted bitterly, tears of rage shining in his eyes.

"Has he?" smiled Warren. "Then I believe Halstead will come in for a pretty handsome reward from your father."

"Maybe," hinted Joe, "if you folks can get us into Nantucket and up at the door of the probate court before the minute of four."

"Start her up, please," begged Halstead, as his feet struck the running board and he squeezed in among the tightly-packed crowd. "What time is it now—exactly?"

"Twelve minutes to four," responded Warren.

"Whew! What if we miss?" quivered Halstead, his face again paling.

"We won't," Warren assured him, as the car lurched forward.

Nor would there have been any danger, but about a mile out of Nantucket something went

wrong with the gasoline flow. The man driving the car had to get out and crawl under. Two others got out and helped him. Halstead, who had wound and set his watch by the deputy's, sat watching the fateful minutes slip by. In a very short time the car was ready to go on again.

"I'll speed her now," promised the man at the steering wheel. "It's make or break."

It was barely one minute before four when the touring car raced in sight of the court building. In Nantucket the news had spread like wildfire and now a crowd of hundreds of residents and summer guests had collected before the court building. But at the gate of the grounds, each with a watch in his hand, stood Horace Dunstan and Lawyer Crane.

"Here they come, Crane, thank heaven!" breathed Mr. Dunstan, tears of joy springing up in his eyes. "Now rush, man—*rush!*"

Inside the court room Judge Swan sat on the bench. Down below stood a solitary clerk. Two court officers lounged listlessly. Judge Swan, having no case before him, was sorting some papers. He looked up to say:

"Mr. Clark, if there's no further business to come before the court to-day, you may declare it adjour——"

"ONE MOMENT, YOUR HONOR!"

Lawyer Crane fairly ran into the court room breathless, waving a paper above his head as though to attract attention.

At that same instant a great, rousing, hoarse cheer began to well up outside.

"I will ask the court to remain on the bench one or two minutes more," called the lawyer imploringly. "My clients, Mr. Horace Dunstan and his son will appear before you instantly."

Then father and son entered. The two court officers had already stirred themselves into life to hold back the crowd of hundreds that attempted to rush in also. Judge Swan nodded to the clerk, and the lawyer, finding that his appeal was heard and granted, lost his excitement, becoming once more the cool, methodical man of affairs.

Tom and Joe, and the officers waited in the corridor in case they should be asked to make oath to their adventures. But the court not having been in session the day before, thanks to Joe's accident, all that was necessary was for the judge to question the two Dunstans, to affix his signature to certain papers and to order the will of Aaron Dunstan entered for probate.

It was all over in ten minutes and court was promptly adjourned, and Master Ted's great inheritance was secured to him if he lived up to

all of the requirements of that remarkable document.

As the two Dunstans came out again the crowd surged about them in a craze of hoarse excitement. Tom and Joe were caught up by men and carried on their shoulders. It was a wild turmoil of laughter, cheering and shouting.

Laughing good-naturedly both boys presently escaped from those who were carrying them. Tom tried to push his way back to the Dunstans. The crowd tried to make way for him, but it could not all be done in an instant. While one of the young captain's hands was behind him he felt a piece of paper thrust against the palm.

As soon as he could, in that great crush, Halstead brought his hand before him. On it, in scrawling letters, had been penned these words:

"It is all over—except your reward."

Reward? Tom Halstead understood that message in an instant. It was a plain threat from the balked Alvarez crew.

CHAPTER XXII

JED RUNS A NAVAL BOMBARDMENT

"GET into my machine, all hands," urged Deputy Sheriff Warren. "It's the only way ever to get out of this crush."

Those who could not sit in the auto had to stand, wedged in, as Warren, clearing a way as fast as he could, got the various members of the party to the car. Then, with a toot of the horn, the machine started.

"I want to get you all over to the hotel to see what is to be done in the way of prosecution," the deputy explained to Mr. Dunstan. "Your lawyer can help us, too, if he will."

Horace Dunstan had as yet had time to have but a very few words with his now astonished son. As soon, however, as the party got in a room by themselves Master Ted stepped quickly over to Halstead, holding out his hand.

"I put up as good a fight against you as I could, captain," he said, "but now I want to apologize and thank you."

"I knew that time would come," Halstead laughed, as he took the younger boy's hand.

"Now we want to understand a few things," broke in Lawyer Crane. "Master Theodore, you have told us that you went away with strangers in obedience to what you considered written instructions from your father. Who handed you that note?"

"Gambon, dad's gardener."

"What did the note say?"

"The note said my inheritance was in great danger, and the two boys dad had hired to run the 'Meteor' were in the plot against me. I was told to go to the men to whom Gambon would take me and to follow their instructions in everything for a few days."

"And you believed all that?" demanded the lawyer.

"Yes. Why not?" challenged Master Ted. "I thought the note was in dad's own writing and he had always told me the truth about everything."

"Did those men treat you roughly?" inquired the lawyer.

"Never a bit of it," replied young Dunstan. "I thought I was having the best time of my life. It was such fun to be in the woods, hiding from the plotters, as they told me, and then scooting about from place to place to get rid of our enemies, as I also thought. And we had a lot of fine fishing. Oh, it was all a great good

time—until Tom Halstead pounced upon me and bore me away."

"Where is that scoundrel, Gambon, now?" asked Lawyer Crane, looking around at the others.

"He ought to be out at the Sanderson farm or near there," replied Joe. "I trailed him there and it was just after Gambon had slipped up to the farmhouse that I ran against Tom in the dark."

"We want that fellow, Gambon," shouted Mr. Dunstan angrily. "I'll pay a good reward to have him caught and jailed."

"Remember, we have only your son's evidence that Gambon handed him the note," replied Mr. Crane. "There is no other witness on the point, and——"

Rap, rap, rap! sounded a brisk summons on the door. Warren admitted three men, one of whom he seemed to know.

"These gentlemen are United States officers," the deputy stated, coming back with the visitors, after a few words exchanged in a low tone. "Mr. Dunstan, this is Mr. Lawrence. The Government turned over to him the letter you sent about Alvarez and that fellow's filibustering work."

"I thought the Government intended to pay no attention to my letter," said Mr. Dunstan.

"At first our department couldn't take up the matter," replied Mr. Lawrence. "All our men were busy. But Mr. Joyce," turning to indicate one of his companions, "has been here on the island since yesterday morning. His news, however, leads us to believe that the filibusters will not attempt to get away from here with their unlawful cargo for a few days yet."

"Then perhaps Mr. Joyce does not know," put in Tom, "that Alvarez and Sanderson have been moving that cargo from the farm buildings down to a new shed near the pier."

The United States officers looked at each other queerly at this information.

"I think," pursued young Captain Halstead, "that the Alvarez crew mean to get their goods away to-night or to-morrow night."

"This matter will have to have quick looking into," said Mr. Lawrence, hastily. "But one thing we came here to learn is whether you intend to prosecute any of that crowd under the state law?"

"If you can get the Alvarez crowd under the federal law," said Lawyer Crane, quickly, "I think you will be able to push the prisoners harder. For one thing, we might be hampered by the fact that Alvarez and his associates didn't actually steal young Dunstan, but lured him away. The same thing, perhaps, but it

might make a difference with a jury. What do you say, Mr. Dunstan? Shall we forego prosecution in favor of giving the national Government the best chance at the offenders?"

"Why, after thinking it over a bit," rejoined Horace Dunstan, "I am inclined to feel that I have won out over the rascals, and I can afford to let it go by by laughing at them."

"Good," nodded Inspector Lawrence. "Then, Mr. Dunstan, there are still hundreds of people outside the hotel, talking over the whole wonderful story. Why don't you go out, the local officers and your lawyer with you? The crowd will be sure to yell for a speech. Make them a little one, and in it state that you consider the joke is on your enemies. Add that you have therefore forgiven that other crowd, and that you will show it by attempting no prosecution."

"I'll do that if it will help you," replied Mr. Dunstan, after looking at his lawyer, who nodded.

"Dad, after this, if you send me notes," said Ted, "you'll have to have a private way of signing your name, so I'll know the note really comes from you."

Warren had been explaining the story of the mystery, aside, to Inspector Joyce, who now broke in:

"Alvarez, as you may not know, was formerly a Mexican. A series of forgeries, committed by him and detected, forced him to flee to Honduras. So it is easy to understand how the note to young Dunstan was forged."

Ted again thanked Tom and Joe, and for that matter, the others who had aided him. Then the Dunstan party prepared to go.

"Halstead, you and your friend will remain, I hope," proposed Mr. Lawrence.

"Certainly he may remain," said Mr. Dunstan. "I fancy he can be of much assistance to you, gentlemen. So will Dawson."

"And Mr. Dunstan," suggested Lawrence, going after Ted's father, "may we, if it seems necessary, use your boat to-night?"

"I would be a poor citizen to refuse that to the Government's officers," smiled Mr. Dunstan. "Certainly you may have the 'Meteor.'"

Warren and his friends remained, but went to another side of the room. Tom and Joe were invited to seat themselves and go over the whole story with the Government officers.

When Lawrence saw the note that had been pressed into Halstead's hand, out in the crowded square, the inspector looked rather grave.

"Yes, that defiance comes from Alvarez," he declared. "Now, Captain Halstead, until the

rascals have been taken, or driven from the country, you will do well to be wholly on your guard. Alvarez, when driven into a corner, is as desperate and remorseless as is the proverbial fighting rat."

"You're going over to Sanderson's place to-night, are you?" asked Joe, after some more of the tale had been told.

"Assuredly," replied Mr. Lawrence. "We shall have to watch every night until an attempt is made to get the unlawful cargo out onto the high seas. But I am afraid Alvarez and his crowd will be in hiding to-night, fearing the local officers on account of the Dunstan business."

"Did you hear the cheers outside?" asked one of Warren's companions, entering at this moment. "Mr. Dunstan just made the requested speech. There was a dead hush when he declared to the crowd that he had no idea of attempting to prosecute the men who had lured his boy away. The crowd was plainly disappointed."

"It will be a good thing for us, if that news reaches the Sanderson-Alvarez crowd," mused Mr. Lawrence.

"I haven't a doubt that the pleasing news will reach 'em," smiled Tom Halstead. "If they had a man in the crowd to force that note

into my hand, the same man must still be there and will take back any news that he can."

"Then we'll stop talking of this matter until we've fortified ourselves with something to eat," proposed Mr. Lawrence. "Are you young men of the 'Meteor' hungry?"

"Hungry?" echoed Halstead, feelingly.

"No, I'm not really hungry," stated Joe. "At the same time if a nice little lamb, roasted whole, tried to walk by me just now, it would show great want of judgment on the lamb's part."

"Then we'll go to supper," declared the inspector rising. "But you young men would do well to keep away from us in the dining room, in case there should be any watchers about for the Alvarez party. We can meet up here again after the meal is over."

When the boys, Warren's party and the three United States officers came together again Mr. Lawrence proposed that Warren take Joe in the auto over to the Dunstan place. Joe and Jed could bring the "Meteor" around to a wharf in Nantucket harbor, and all could embark.

"The trip could be made by land, in autos, of course," Inspector Lawrence explained to Halstead. "But there's a possibility that we may need to pursue a filibustering steam craft."

Later on the hotel party sauntered down, in

three or four groups, to the wharf in question. By the time they arrived at the water front they made out the "Meteor" just gliding into the harbor, Jed Prentiss at the wheel and Joe in the engine room. The entire party quickly embarked, Tom now taking the wheel. Darkness was just coming down as the "Meteor" with no lights showing by Mr. Lawrence's order, stole around Great Point. Now, Halstead let out a few more notches of speed, the boat going swiftly down the east coast of the island.

"Joe," murmured Tom, his eyes shining as his chum came up from the engine room, "do you remember the 'great night' we had off the mouth of the Kennebec?"

"Yes," nodded Dawson, "but this is going to be easier for us. Instead of one, there are seven officers aboard to-night, and the sea is almost glassy. This won't be anything but a business trip, so to speak."

Whether Joe was right in his prediction yet remained to be seen. At Halstead's suggestion, made to Inspector Lawrence, the "Meteor" was run quietly into a small cove, just north of a bend that, in daylight, would have shut them out of a view of Sanderson's pier. As the motor boat was carrying no lights Mr. Lawrence felt confident that they had made the cove with-

out having been discovered from lower down the coast.

"We'll want two guides who know every foot of the way," decided Mr. Lawrence. "Dawson will know the way to the outbuildings behind the farmhouse, and the lay of the ground about there. Halstead, you can pilot some of us over the ground near the pier. Now that the anchor is overboard the 'Meteor' will be safe here. Prentiss can remain aboard. Even if he discovered trouble threatening, he could raise the anchor and slip swiftly out into open water. The 'Meteor' can show a vanishing stern to any other boat in these waters."

"And if you *should* want to signal us for help, Jed," said Tom, a moment later, bringing up on deck a box from one of the lockers, "here are the signal rockets and Roman candles. Wait a moment."

Tom disappeared below once more, to return with a tin-lined trough affair. By means of two hooks he made this device fast at the port rail. This "trough" was intended to rest a rocket in before touching it off and sending it skyward.

"I'll be snug and safe as anything," declared Jed, smiling. He felt brave enough, in fact, until the dingey, going ashore for the second time, carried the last of his companions. Then all

was still, absolutely quiet, lonely and black. Jed, being highly imaginative, began to fancy he saw figures darting from tree to tree on shore. The bushes had a mysterious look, for it was so nearly dark that he could just make out their outlines.

Prentiss had said of himself that he was a hero, in theory, but that when danger faced him he was likely to forget much of his courage. There are many such boys. They are not cowards, but are imaginative, have highly strung nervous systems, and are without real experience of danger. When that experience does come they often find themselves possessed of far more grit than they had believed.

Time slipped by. Nothing happened to justify the state of Jed's nerves. He was lonely, and wondering what the others were doing. At last, however, he heard something real. Prentiss sprang up, stepping to the port rail to listen. The sound was unmistakable, that of a marine engine, though as yet the sound was far away.

"Can that be the filibustering steamer?" Jed wondered, thrilling.

Nearer and nearer came the sound. Prentiss was enough of a salt-water boy to know that the craft must be a more than usually fast one. The strange craft was evidently keeping in close to shore. At last, the keen-eyed boy grimly

made out a sea-going tug. Then she came nearer, and Jed knew that she was going to pass within an eighth of a mile.

"It must be the filibustering steamer," throbbed the boy. "She's not a Government boat, yet she's showing no lights. That boat *must* be making for Sanderson's pier!"

Then, all of a sudden, a single light *did* show. An electric searchlight blazed out, sweeping its ray along the coast. It was hardly a moment before that ray of light fell across the "Meteor" and remained there.

"Wow!" ejaculated Jed, in his excitement. "Now, those fellows can get in here before I can signal any of our crowd back to the 'Meteor.' "

Prentiss immediately found himself trembling. He sprang down into the engine room, intent on starting the motor. In his excitable state of mind it seemed to him that the motor had at least a dozen drive wheels and no end of other things that had to be handled.

"And, oh, dear! I haven't got the anchor up!" he groaned. He rushed up onto deck, only to find that the tug had started ahead again, and was bearing down directly upon him. Three men could be dimly made out forward of the pilot house.

"They're going to bear down upon this craft and sink her!" guessed Jed. "And, confound

'em, they can do it before I can get up anchor, get the engine going, and get out of here!"

That it was the intention of those aboard the tug to ram the "Meteor," and thus put her out of commission, seemed decidedly plain. The tug was steaming slow but straight for the motor boat. Jed paused in a frenzy of uncertainty.

Then, all in a flash, a luminous idea came to him. It looked almost crazy, yet it was the only thing that it seemed possible to do. Bending down the signal rocket box, Jed grasped a piece of slow-match. This he lighted, his fingers trembling. Then, as swiftly, he unfastened the lower hook of that rocket trough. He was able, thus, to swivel the trough over the port rail.

"Now, we'll see if the scheme's any good," quivered Jed, snatching up a rocket and resting it in the trough. Groping for his slow-match, he sighted along the stick of the rocket. Shaking, he applied the glowing end of the slow-match to the rocket's fuse. There was a sputtering, then a hiss.

Out over the waters shot the rocket, leaving behind a fiery trail. It flew about three feet above the top of the tug's pilot house, dropping into the ocean beyond.

"It was my trembling hand that spoiled my

aim," gasped Jed. "Now, another, and steady, old boy!"

Jed fitted the second rocket, applying the match. Whizz! Smash!

"Ho, ho!" roared Jed, for that rocket, going straight and true, had smashed a light of glass in the tug's pilot house. Bang! Being an explosive rocket, the thing blew into a thousand fragments inside that pilot house. A yell came from the man at the helm.

But Jed did not waste time looking or listening. He fitted another rocket, touching it off after swift aim. That one whizzed between the heads of two of the three men out forward, and Jed heard their rough words of alarm and anger.

"Wow!" ejaculated the boy. "I'm a whole Navy! What?"

Another rocket he aimed at the three men. They scrambled in all directions. Still another rocket Prentiss drove through the pilot house windows. Jed heard the engine room bell jingle for the stop.

"I'll give you plenty of it," gritted Prentiss, thrusting a hand into the box and bringing forth this time a stout Roman candle—a fourteen-ball affair.

Lighting and waving it, Jed was ready, at the pop of the first ball, to aim the affair at the tug boat. The missiles fell all about. Though Jed

did not know it, one of the hot, glowing balls struck Captain Jonas French squarely on the end of his bulb-like nose. He let out an Indian-like yell, dropping the wheel. Another man crawled in on his knees to take the skipper's place, but he kept down below the wood-work of the front of the pilot house, steering by the lower spokes of the wheel.

The tug's bell sounded for reversed speed, then for the go-ahead, as the craft swung her bow around. They were retreating, but Jed, chuckling aloud in his glee, sent three more rockets after the tug, just to show her people that he had plenty of ammunition left. Then, when the tug was out of range, Jed stood up, gazing after her dim lines.

"Say, maybe there a few Deweys left in America," he laughed aloud. "I wonder what's the answer?"

CHAPTER XXIII

SPYING ON THE FILIBUSTERS

MEANWHILE, at the Sanderson farm, business was proceeding at a rate that entitled the word to be spelled with a very large capital "B."

Mr. Lawrence and his comrades, under Cap-

tain Tom's pilotage, were hidden where, despite the darkness, they could get a very fair idea of what was going on at the pier. Joe had led Warren and the other local officers up where they could know what was going on behind the farmhouse. Sanderson, Alvarez and all hands except Captain Jonas French, were working like so many industrious ants. Two of the men were moving cases out of the new shed onto the pier. The rest were bringing cases down to the pier from the farm outbuilding. All the cases were being piled at the end of the pier.

"That means they're going to ship everything to-night," whispered Mr. Lawrence.

"When are you going to jump on them?" Halstead asked.

"Not until they get everything on their vessel, and get out on the water. If we showed ourselves now, and tried to arrest the crowd, what could we prove? Sanderson has a perfect right to stack any kinds of merchandise on his pier. But when we overhaul a craft out on the water, loaded down with filibuster's supplies, and the captain of that craft can show no regular papers for such a cargo, then we have the crowd where we want them."

It was a dull time waiting, but Inspector Lawrence was right, as a man of his experience was quite likely to be. The time slipped on,

with no open move on the part of the law's people.

"I thought I saw a rocket up north, then," whispered Tom, at last.

"Watch and see whether there's another," replied Lawrence, also in a whisper. But the rocket Tom had seen was the last that Jed had derisively shot after the retreating tug. It wasn't long, however, before the young motor boat skipper and the United States officers heard the sound of the tug approaching. They lay low, but watched quietly until the tug had docked at the end of Sanderson's pier.

"We'll still have to use patience," smiled Mr. Lawrence, turning to Tom. "This is going to be a watching game for some time yet."

By now the gang that had been bringing cases down from the outbuilding all filed out onto the pier. The sounds of brisk but regular loading followed. An hour of this work, monotonous for the hidden watchers, followed, and then another hour. Neither Tom Halstead nor Mr. Lawrence, from their hiding place, could see the cargo piles on the pier very distinctly.

"Halstead," inquired the inspector, "do you suppose you can safely wriggle nearer, and see how far the loading has gone?"

"I know I can," Tom answered. "I'll go

slowly about it, and make never a sound, or show myself."

After a few minutes, in fact, Tom got within seven or eight feet of the pier. He had crawled over the ground, and now lay flat with his head behind the roots of a tree.

From where he lay he could make out Don Emilio Alvarez standing talking with Captain Jonas French. The latter, with a swollen nose and a powder-burned cheek, was telling the gentleman from Honduras all about Prentiss's remarkable achievement.

"Oh, say, but that was grand of old Jed!" breathed Tom, his sides shaking with suppressed laughter. "If Jed doesn't get a Carnegie medal I'll have my opinion of some folks!"

Don Emilio tossed away a half-burned cigar. The butt fell close by the tree roots that helped conceal the head of the young motor boat skipper. Perhaps the little brown man started slightly from something that the glowing tobacco showed him. At all events, he spoke in a whisper to Jonas French. The next instant both leaped down from the shore end of the pier, rushing at the tree.

Tom Halstead sprang up, prepared to sprint for it, but hardly had he started when he felt himself gripped savagely by French. One instant more, and Tom Halstead found himself

being borne, despite his yells and furious, fighting struggles, out along the pier.

"All aboard and cast off!" yelled Jonas French, as he sped on over the boards. The last case of the cargo had just gone over the tug's rail, and now two men sprang to cast off bow and stern hawsers. The engine room bell jangled just as French and Alvarez, with their strenuous prisoner, sprang aboard.

Inspector Lawrence and his two comrades had lost no time. They now came dashing from concealment, but they were too late. As they arrived at the end of the pier the tug was a hundred yards on her way.

At the starboard rail stood two seamen, holding Tom as in a vise. Behind the young motor boat skipper stood Don Emilio Alvarez, waving a taunting hand at the officers. Jonas French had gone forward to take command of the tug.

The seamen, powerful, swarthy fellows who looked like Portuguese, held Tom at the rail until the tug was half a mile from shore.

"Now, you can let go of him, my men," nodded Alvarez, "but watch the young man.

"Mr. Captain, how would you like to stroll aft and look at a nice surprise we may serve out to your friends?" The Honduran's tone was mocking, bantering, but Tom Halstead, filled with curiosity, accepted the invitation.

Alvarez led the way, the two seamen going behind the boy.

On the deck aft stood something of considerable size, covered by a canvas tarpaulin.

"Take off the covering," directed Don Emilio. The two seamen obeyed.

"Fine, is it not?" chuckled Alvarez, pointing to a brightly polished brass cannon.

"Yes; fine—not!" spoke Tom, in a voice of mingled anger and disgust.

"It is a signal gun, such as every vessel is allowed to carry," chuckled Don Emilio. "But our signal gun will also carry a two-inch shell—and we have plenty of ammunition. If your precious 'Meteor' attempts to follow us to-night we shall send her to the bottom of the ocean! You see, our cargo is needed by brave and patriotic men in Honduras, and we are desperate enough to take it there in the face of everyone."

Then, changing his tone, Alvarez, as he glared at the boy, went on:

"Once you were good enough to ask me what I would do to you if I had you in Honduras. Well, I shall show you, for you are bound for that fine little country!"

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

YOUNG Halstead started and paled, as anyone else would have done at such awesome information. Then he forced a sneer to his lips.

"Are you foolish enough to think, Don Emilio, that you are going to be allowed to escape tonight? You will sink the 'Meteor?' Perhaps, but what will you do with that United States cruiser over there off the port bow?"

As he pointed and spoke, Don Emilio and the two seamen rushed to the port rail. Tom was quick to seize the chance that he had made. Sooner than trust himself in Don Emilio's hands, he would risk the dangers of the deep.

When Don Emilio turned back Halstead was no longer on board. Leaping to the starboard rail, Tom had sprung as far out as he could, and the waters had closed over him.

In taking this desperate leap Tom had calculated, as well as he could, on avoiding the suction of the tug's propellers. As he struck the water he fought against that suction, and soon felt himself beyond it.

When he came to the surface the fast-going

tug was so far ahead that Alvarez could not make out so small an object as the boy's head through the darkness and at the distance.

"Oh, the young fool has preferred drowning to going to Honduras!" cried Alvarez, turning to the seamen. "Very good; let him have his choice."

Tom, however, had no immediate plan of drowning. He was an expert swimmer, and with the sea as smooth as it was to-night not even his clothing hampered him much. In fact, he did not waste much strength on swimming, but soon allowed himself to float, treading water whenever it became necessary.

When the tug was leaving the wharf the young skipper was rather certain he had heard revolver shots, which would quickly bring the law's whole fighting force together.

"They'll come hustling along in the 'Meteor,' " thought the boy. "If I can only make myself seen it will be easier to be picked up than to swim ashore."

Nor was it long ere he beheld the rays of a searchlight flashing over the water. The searchlight came nearer. Halstead felt certain that the rays came from the boat that was usually under his command.

"Lawrence knows I was lugged aboard the tug, and Joe knows me well enough to know

I'd jump sooner than stay with that crowd," was the opinion with which Halstead comforted himself.

Nor was he disappointed. After a little the rays of the searchlight shone in his eyes, forcing him to close them. But he waved one hand aloft. Nearer came the "Meteor," and nearer, until Halstead saw that the boat was heading straight for him. Speed was shut off, while hails sounded from the motor boat's deck. The trim little craft, moving under headway only, came close alongside, while Jed tossed a line over.

"Good old Tom!" cheered Jed. "Now, if you're fit, swim for it."

So Tom Halstead, dripping, but triumphant and vengeful, returned to his command.

"Take charge, captain, if you feel like it," urged Lawrence, and Tom, after casting aside his water-soaked coat, stepped to the wheel. "Keep right on after that tug," added the inspector. "I'll swing the searchlight for you."

"I must caution you, though," spoke Captain Halstead, after he had given Joe the go-ahead word, "that the tug carries a two-inch gun and plenty of shells. Alvarez assured me that they'd sink you."

"I don't believe they'll dare," rejoined Mr. Lawrence, grimly compressing his lips. "How-

ever, keep right on after them, and we shall see."

The tug was quickly picked up by the searchlight.

"Whew! How she's cutting the water!" exclaimed Mr. Lawrence. "That tug was surely built for fast work. She's easily an eighteen-knot boat."

While the chase kept up, Tom detailed his brief adventure aboard the filibustering craft.

Though the tug was showing fine speed, the "Meteor" was so much faster that at last the motor boat, dead astern, was within half a mile.

Bang! came a sharp report over the water, following a sharp, red flash from the tug's cannon.

"Blank charge—no shell," commented Inspector Lawrence, coolly.

Holding the searchlight to the tug's after deck, however, the inspector and his friends saw two men again loading the brass cannon.

There was another flash, a report, and a projectile whizzed by to the starboard of the motor boat.

"They seem to mean business, Joyce," muttered the inspector. "You know what comes now."

Joyce and his comrade disappeared into the

cabin, swiftly returning with repeating rifles that they had brought aboard.

Tom, in the meantime, had slowed down the speed of the "Meteor." To those aboard the tug it might have looked as though the officers were giving up the pursuit.

"Go ahead, now, captain," directed Mr. Lawrence. "Right after the scoundrels at full speed."

As the "Meteor" once more cut the water, showing that she could easily overhaul the tug, Alvarez and two of his men were shown in the searchlight rays to be returning to their cannon.

"Open up on them, but just pester them," directed the inspector. "Don't try to hit them unless they insist on loading their piece."

Zip! zip! zip! Bullets struck the deck house and side rails of the tug as the two United States officers fired rapidly.

Alvarez, at the first fire, pulled off his hat, waving it defiantly. But now the continuous fire from the motor boat drove all three from the gun. They fled forward.

"Close right in alongside," ordered Mr. Lawrence grinning. "Joyce and the other man are experts at the rifle game."

It took but a few minutes to close the gap between tug and motor boat. As the "Meteor"

ran up to port of the filibusters Captain Jonas French was the only man showing beside the seaman in the pilot house.

"We're going to run alongside and board you!" yelled the inspector. "We won't have any nonsense, either. It will be worse for you if you try it."

"What are your orders?" asked Captain Jonas, resignedly.

"Stop your speed and reverse. Then lie to and wait for us to board."

"Aye, aye, sir," growled French, in the tone of a man who had played and lost. The tug soon lay motionless on the water, while the "Meteor" ranged in alongside. Lawrence and his two comrades stepped over the tug's rail first. Then Deputy Warren and his three brother officers followed. They represented only the county authorities, but had come along to make the force stronger.

As the two craft fell away again Tom waved his hand banteringly to Alvarez, now out on deck and being searched for weapons.

"Sorry, Don Emilio, that I couldn't spare the time to go to Honduras with you," called the young skipper. "But stay with us here in America for a while."

Saluting with their whistles the two craft parted company, the "Meteor" returning to the

Dunstan place with only her regular crew aboard.

Few words are needed to complete this present narrative of the doings of the Motor Boat Club boys.

Master Ted Dunstan, of course, entered in upon the first portion of his great inheritance, and is now earnestly proceeding to fit himself, in every way possible, for a cadetship at West Point, preparatory to becoming an officer in the Army. In time he will unquestionably qualify to inherit the great fortune that was bequeathed him under such unusual conditions. It was afterwards proven, and most satisfactorily, that Ted's Uncle Gregory had no part in the plot against the boy. That conspiracy was hatched in the fertile brain of Don Emilio Alvarez. Further, it may be stated that Gregory Dunstan has sold his plantation in Honduras, and that he is never likely to become again mixed up in a revolution in Honduras, for he has become again a resident of Massachusetts. Alvarez, probably, was all along the cause of Gregory Dunstan's mixing in the politics of Honduras, and Don Emilio had hoped, by throwing the great Dunstan fortune to Uncle Gregory, to put it where the Honduran politicians could draw upon it.

Farmer Sanderson did not leave on the tug, but was arrested at his own home. He was afterwards sentenced, in a United States court, to serve one year in prison for aiding the filibusters. Captain Jonas French and Alvarez were each sentenced to serve two years, while the other Hondurans received a year apiece. The mate and crew of the tug were discharged from custody, as it was considered they had not been plotters, but had merely signed for a cruise, as they might have done aboard any other vessel. Gambon escaped, but was lately injured in a railway wreck, and is now crippled for life.

Horace Dunstan, as he promised, did not prosecute through the State courts. He was well pleased at the happy ending of the whole affair, and considered that Alvarez and the others had been sufficiently punished. Pedro, a Jamaica negro who had afterwards gone to Honduras to live, and thus spoke both English and Spanish, was one of the Hondurans to receive a year's sentence, as his connection with the Alvarez crowd was fully established.

The yellow launch that Tom was instrumental in seizing was afterwards claimed by, and surrendered to, a boat-owner up the coast who had rented the boat to Captain Jonas French.

Tom and Joe? They are still the leading members of the Motor Boat Club. Jed was also

admitted, and is one of the most expert of the young members.

Horace Dunstan rewarded everyone who had anything to do with the liberation and protection of his son. Tom, Joe and Jed were all offered much larger rewards than any one of them could be induced to accept. Yet each of the boys, in the end, accepted a sum that provided not only a good time at once, but also for each a tidy little reserve fund in bank.

Here we will take leave of the three boys amid Nantucket surroundings. They will be heard from again, however, at a later date, in a further volume, filled with their exciting adventures, under the title: "THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB OFF LONG ISLAND; Or, A Daring Marine Game at Racing Speed."

THE END

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